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The Young Engineer;

OR, FIGHTING AGAINST ODDS.

By Howard Devere.



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THE YOUNG ENGINEER; or, FIGHTING AGAINST ODDS.

BY HOWARD DEVERE.

CHAPTER I.

A FIENDISH PIECE OF BUSINESS.

"HAVE you both got revolvers?"

"Yes."

"And both feel willing to take the risk?"

"We do."

Alexander Hernshaw, president of the Insbruck and Overton Railroad, breathed a sigh of relief, yet his face remained clouded with an anxious look.

"Well, boys," he said, "to say more to you is useless, for I am satisfied you both know your duty. But one word. In the baggage car is a large amount of gold bullion, shipped over our line by the government, the orders concerning which are, that it is to be taken to its destination without delay. This is the reason of this night trip; and, boys, if you carry it safely through to Overton, you shall have a hundred dollars apiece."

"No need of promising a reward, Mr. Hernshaw," said Jake Lockwood, a veteran engineer. "We'll do our duty like men, more we cannot do."

"Well said," cried Hernshaw; "well, time's up, take out your engine, and God grant you a safe run; and, my lads, don't spare the fuel or the engine, but shove her along for all she's worth."

"I understand, sir," said Jake, this time from the cab-window. "Good-night, sir," and with his hand on the half-opened throttle, No. 49 glided out of the round-house, switched on to the main track, and backing up, coupled fast to a train consisting of one passenger train and one baggage car.

An hour before, just at quitting time, Hernshaw had entered the round house, and in almost an unheard voice, so faintly he spoke, asked:

"Will any engineer volunteer to take a train to Overton to-night?"

As the question was asked, faces were turned away, the paler for hearing it, and many a man's knees trembled and hands shook, and dead silence reigned for some minutes.

"Will any man go?"

Silence profound answered him until Jake Lockwood spoke up.

"If nobody else will go, I will," he said; "that is, if my fireman will go?" half speaking to the person indicated in a questioning tone.

Instantly every eye was turned to where, just beneath the glare of a large oil lamp, stood Jake's fireman, a youth of twenty or so, by name Nat Norwood.

Let us describe him as he stands.

Twenty years old, we will say; light complexion, but with cheeks tanned a darker hue and slightly red; a rather square, but handsome, beardless face, set off by a pair of sunny blue eyes that seemed all laughter and merriment, and a profusion of chestnut curls clinging tightly about his head; a pair of overalls, a blue flannel shirt with a black silk tie about his collar, and a jaunty cap; there we have Nat Norwood, a lad with spirit and dash in every word, action and look.

Mr. Hernshaw, too, glanced at the young fellow, saying:

"Well, what say you?"

"That where Jake goes I will," was the prompt, manly reply.

And so it was arranged, and steam was got up on "49," and she was hitched on the train as described.

The going forth of this train was an event of great moment, for previous to this only two night trains had been run across the road, and they had both been thrown from the track, all the valuables on board stolen, and the engineer and the conductor and such of the passengers as did not take to their heels quick enough, were most brutally murdered.

From Insbruck to Overton was one hundred and fifty miles, part of it through a rough country, but rougher far in another sense, for the secure fastnesses in the wilds surrounding were infested by a regularly organized gang of villains, who made the wrecking of trains their business, and it was this gang that had wrecked the two previous night trains, and murdered the defenseless passengers.

It was for this reason that the president of the I. & O. R. R. had asked if the attaches of the train were armed.

The conductor gave the signal to go, and Jake Lockwood, standing at his post, opened the valve; this was followed by the hissing of steam, and then old "49" glided gracefully out of the station, and gathering headway, was soon rushing across the open country enveloped in the blackness of night.

Nat quietly attended to his fires, then mounted into the cab and

peered out of the window opposite that by which the engineer stood. He gazed ahead along as much of the track as was revealed by the headlight, and as they skimmed along over the iron rails, whose glistening surface resembled two long lines of white light, he fell to thinking and his face grew serious.

He was thinking of the dangers in the way.

And so was Jake Lockwood, and brave man that he was, his face grew a little pale; not that either was afraid, for hand in hand they would have challenged the devil himself to mortal combat.

At danger, alive and active, they both would have smiled, but to be rushing along in deep darkness, with only a few feet of rail, perhaps, between them and death, was not pleasant to contemplate.

Ten miles, twenty, thirty; they rushed past a little way station, from whose little window a light was still gleaming, and Alexander Hernshaw, seated in the office at Insbruck, received the message:

"Train just passed O. K."

Twenty miles further on was another station, and then beyond this there stretched away a long space of uninhabited country, part rough and part smooth plains; forty minutes later this was passed, and again came a message:

"Train passing."

Up to this time Jake and Nat had spoken a few words, but when this last station was passed, both lapsed into profound silence, and each leaning from a cab window, watched for signs of danger, for now they were come to the stretch of road where the two previous night trains had been wrecked.

They began ascending a grade, Jake shortened the speed of his engine; they passed it; then came a smooth stretch of nearly ten miles, and here he let old "49" go at her best.

Well did the engine respond to the hand that opened the steam valve, and fairly flew along the rails.

Faster—faster; swaying—bounding, but ever sticking to the tracks.

Jake Lockwood stood at his post cool and collected, yet in his veins there burned a certain quiet excitement, which the circumstances could not fail to create.

And Nat Norwood, bent out of the cab window, felt nearly the same; calm he certainly appeared, yet the excitement reddened his cheeks and kept a glow in them which the keen cutting of the wind could not erase.

One, two, three miles were passed over in nearly a breath; four, five—and then, going at the rate of fifty miles an hour, Nat Norwood saw, not two hundred feet ahead, a death trap set for them.

"Good God, Jake! do you see that?" he cried. "See there!"

And well he might exclaim, "See there!" for across the track was a high barricade of logs, to encounter which must inevitably throw them from the track, following which must ensue death and destruction.

But Jake Lockwood had already seen the danger which threatened him, and, seizing a rope, he whistled down brakes, while quick as a flash of lightning his hand grasped the lever; but it was not granted him to reverse the engine, for a pistol shot broke the stillness of the night, and Jake, flinging up his arms, groaned out:

"I'm shot! God help me, I'm dying!" and fell to the cab floor a corpse.

Nat Norwood was almost paralyzed for an instant, and then he sprang across the cab, and, standing with a foot on either side of Jake's body, he seized the lever and drew it back when but forty or fifty feet from the barricade.

Ten seconds sooner the action would have saved them; but the momentum gained by the great speed at which they had been going was too much to be overcome by the brakes and the reversing of the engine combined, and on toward destruction the train went at a fearful rate, yet one which was lessened every second; yet too late had it come, and in less time than it takes to tell it, old "49" had struck the barricade—had given one grand leap upward as if to mount the obstruction, and then tumbling sideways, lay alongside of the track—a complete wreck.

Just ere she struck, a pistol shot rang out, and a ball whistled through Nat's cap and cut away a lock of his hair. He held his own revolver in his hand, and locating the direction of the shot, he fired at random, but evidently with effect, for there at once arose a howl of pain. He sprang to the cab door, and just as "49" took the first jump, he leaped to the ground, and revolver in hand, turned to face the enemy. The tender followed the engine, and tumbled headlong from the track, but owing to the accidental breaking of the coupling, the baggage car missed this fate, and going ahead brought up

against the barricade with fearful force, jumped the rail, but remained in an upright position, while the passenger coach in the rear, built with a lighter frame, telescoped itself on the back of the baggage car.

The conductor and one passenger who were in the coach saved their lives by jumping from the rear platform, but only did so to meet a worse fate, for just then, with a terrifying yell, a dozen or more ruffians rushed from the low brush, and meeting the two at once riddled them with bullets, and both fell without so much as a groan.

Nat at once sprang to the platform, arriving there at precisely the same moment that also did one of the ruffians, whom Nat at once sent to kingdom come by a well-directed shot, and then he pounded on the door for admittance.

"Who is it?" gasped the two frightened government officials, who were taking charge of the bullion.

"Nat, the fireman," was the reply. "Open quick and let me in; our only chance lies in securing ourselves in here and keeping the hounds at bay. Quick—now—open!" Crack—crack! "Keep back—keep back! Ha! that's for you, and this for you, and you," and indicating as he spoke the black figures that had rushed to the platform and were clambering on it, he fired shot after shot in their midst.

"Down with him, boys!" cried a voice of command, evidently that of the leader. "Shoot him! Can't you shoot straight? D—— him, let me get a shot at him."

Crack! A little puff of fire and smoke, and Nat felt a stinging pain in his shoulder, but nothing daunted, he aimed at the foremost of the gang and fired, and another of the villains bit the dust in his death agonies.

"Open!" cried Nat. "Open for God's sake; I can't keep them at bay much longer. Quick—quick!"

A black horde of ruffians rushed up in a body and surrounded the platform; some half mounted the steps, and one venturesome individual seized Nat's foot and sought to drag him off the platform, but he retired with a yell and a broken jaw, caused by Nat's free, heavy-shod foot.

Another drew a careful bead on him, and the fellow's finger was even pressing the trigger when Nat observed him; there was no time to lose; he whirled his empty revolver upward, then threw it with force and precision into the wrecker's face, disconcerting his aim and saving his own life.

The car door opened half an inch; the terrified messengers wanted to first assure themselves that Nat was what he represented himself to be; they caught sight of him, and would have opened the door had not they seen the raging, cursing horde with which the lad was battling; more cowardly than ever they would have slammed the door shut had not Nat's quick eye seen all, and his brain comprehended what he saw; it was no time to stand on ceremony, and sticking his fingers in the crack, he wedged in his foot, braced himself, gave a violent push, bore down the opposition of the cowards, and slid through the space which he had vacated by less than a second's time, when a volley of bullet's whistled through it; seizing hold of the door, he closed and locked it just in time to thwart the entrance of those who had quickly rushed upon the platform.

The upper part of the door was of thick glass, and standing outside the ruffians could see the exact location of those inside, as evidenced by a ball that whistled uncomfortably close to Nat's head; but this he soon remedied by several shots, which extinguished the lamps, and turned the tables, for they could now see the wreckers without themselves being seen.

Thus affairs remained for a few minutes, and then seeing the outlines of a human figure, Nat yanked out his second revolver, and taking careful aim, fired through the glass, and watching closely, saw the man drop like a stone.

"Ha—ha!" he cried, "you won't wreck any more trains. Ah, there's another." Crack! "He's sick, I'll bet a dollar, and another at the other end of the car." Crack! "He's gone, but I don't think I hit him. Hey there, you two dirty cowards," speaking to the two messengers,

"what do you mean by crouching there in the corner like whipped curs? stand up like men. Ah!" Crack! "Missed, by thunder!" and in this wise, kept busy popping at heads outlined here, there and everywhere at doors and windows, Nat passed an active fifteen minutes.

Then came a cessation of hostilities, and the raging, cursing and tramping of feet withdrew some distance.

"They are holding a consultation," thought Nat.

And so they were; over thirty in number, divided into three parties, in the beginning, one steady hand holding a never-failing revolver, had balked them of their prey, and had already stretched five of their men out in a condition fit only for crows to feed on.

Brian Conway, or Captain Con, as he was most frequently called, was he who had fired the shot at Nat which took effect in his shoulder; he had directed the fight until he could find no man among his vile crew brave enough to attempt getting a shot at those inside the car; to go on the platform, and show a head above the solid part of the door, meant a bullet in their skulls, and so the men hung back; then, in a rage, Captain Con called them some distance away and held a council of war. What was to be done.

How could they reduce the enemy, and gain an entrance into the car.

An hour slipped by in fruitless discussion, and Nat inwardly wondered at the peace that had settled over things, and half entertained the hope that the wreckers, finding them invincible, would quietly pull up stakes and leave.

When the minutes dragged along further, he began to think that perhaps they had already gone, and when half an hour had expired, he began to think this certain.

But he was doomed to disappointment, for from without a voice cried:

"I say, there!"

"What do you want?" asked Nat.

"Want to have a talk with you."

"Fire ahead."

"Come out on the platform."

"You infernal jackass! do you think I'm a born fool? Talk where you are."

"Well, if you'll quietly surrender, we won't hurt you."

"You won't?" said Nat.

"No!"

"Well, I don't think so, either," in a dry voice and manner.

"You'll surrender, then?"

"No!"

"What do you say?"

"Go to the devil!" was the sharp answer, followed from outside by a storm of curses, and then Captain Con, for he was the speaker, withdrew a short distance, and talked the matter over further with his gang.

Nearly another hour passed, and then Nat heard a wild shout a short distance away—a shout expressing joy and satisfaction, and he knew it meant that a plan of action had been decided on.

The two messengers also felt this truth, and they trembled in their shoes.

Then a voice, gruff with rage, sung out:

"Will you surrender, once for all?"

"Yes, we surrender!" cried both the cowardly messengers, in a breath.

"You lie!" hissed Nat; then fairly shrieked: "No we don't surrender!" and then leveling his revolver, he sternly said: "*The first man that even hints of surrender, or that sneaks out of fighting, I'll shoot like a dog!*"

CHAPTER II.

TO THE RESCUE.

ALEXANDER HENSHAW, after reading the brief second message—"train passing"—sank back in an easy chair, with an air which plainly spoke of a self-restrained im-

patience; he knew that he could not expect to again hear from the train for an hour or more.

So he sat quite still, and watched the hands of the station clock as they slowly told off the passing minutes.

An hour passed, he roused from his chair, and hitched closer to the telegraphic instrument which remained as silent and dumb as the grave; fifteen minutes more sped away, still no news; five, ten minutes Hernshaw waited, then he aroused several men.

"Get up steam on '30,' Ben; and you, Jack, hurry around and wake up the men named on the list.

These names were those of men who had pledged themselves to take the law into their own hands, and try to punish the train-wreckers if the law failed to reach them.

Ten minutes more slipped away, still that strange little instrument, with its queer method of conveying intelligence, remained dumb and silent.

And then one by one men came almost breathless into the station, so great had they hurried.

Ten minutes more passed; then Hernshaw ordered:

"Bring out '30' with one car attached," then turning to those who had gathered, he said: "According to agreement, gentlemen, I have sent for you. You all know the fate of the two night trains we dispatched over the road. To-night it became imperative to send another, and I have every reason to suppose it has fallen in bad hands. How many will go with me to the rescue?"

"I—and I—and I!" came from all sides.

"Then get on board. Are you all armed?"

"We are."

"Then jump aboard. All right, engineer, go ahead, and do your d—est."

Hernshaw seldom ever swore, but when he did, those who were best acquainted with him, knew that he was terribly in earnest; and he looked earnest, too.

His face was set and determined, his lips were tightly closed, and his eyes gleamed with a dangerous fire.

The engineer heeded his instructions, and "30" dashed westward like the wind.

And how fared Nat and his companions? We shall see.

At Nat's defiant answer the wreckers set up a howl of rage, and poured volley after volley through the windows, but the three inmates of the cars were sheltered safely from the leaden rain behind the woodwork.

The wreckers meanwhile, kept up a continual shouting, whose meaning troubled Nat somewhat.

But it was explained when he heard the gur—r—r of the teeth of a saw in wood at the further end of the car.

Keeping bent, he crawled thither, and sure enough there was the blade of a saw working up and down through the floor, a saw which he recognized as belonging in the tool chest of old "49."

He waited until he had correctly located the position of the sawyer, and then fired at him through the floor.

Immediately there came one wild shriek, and then all became quiet as death for several minutes, the wreckers giving over both firing and shouting.

But when they ascertained that Nat's shot had proved fatal, there arose one prolonged cry, such as might be uttered by a famished wolf when he strikes a trail of blood that is to lead him to a helpless near-by victim.

Hundreds of shots they poured into the car, and then all the hubbub again ceased suddenly, and a few minutes after, Captain Con's voice was heard, saying:

"Say, you fellows in there, we give you one last chance to surrender. We know you've bullion on board, and by—we're going to have it, melted, if we can't get it any other way. If you don't surrender, you'll be burned to death, for we're going to fire the car. Do you yield?"

"Never!" cried Nat, loudly; "never, so help me God! Stop your whining, you cursed fools!"—this to the two messengers. "Isn't it better to roast to death quietly, than to be torn limb from limb by these wolves?"

"Surely they will not kill us if we were to give up the gold?" whispered one.

"They couldn't have the heart to do it," muttered the other.

"Heart?" said Nat, mockingly. "Ha—ha—ha! you don't know these men; they'd cut a baby's throat for a sixpence. Heart? bah! they're devils in human shape. No, we will not surrender, and the first one of you that makes any such move, knows what to expect," and he tapped his reloaded revolver suggestively.

Did they dare fire the car?

Dare! Yes, and Nat knew that they would do so, yet his cheek never blanched, his heart never quailed. He would not desert the car until forced to, and then——

His resolute face, his flashing eyes, told the rest.

He waited quietly. Fifteen minutes passed. Had they done as they threatened?

Thus he questioned himself; his answer came very soon.

A little spiral column of flame shot up at the far end of the car. Yes, it was on fire, and now that the devouring flames had burst through, they spread with frightful rapidity.

The scorching tongues of flame ran along the woodwork, mounted up around the windows, caught the roof in its fiery embrace, and presently the fire was dancing upward into the clear night air.

Nearer and nearer it came, and further and further they retreated, until they were hemmed in in the forward part of the car, just beside the door; on a piece of wood Nat projected his cap before the door, and the next instant a bullet went whizzing through it; he let it drop and gave an unearthly shriek; it had its reward, for two minutes afterwards a man mounted the platform and attempted to get a view of the interior of the car.

Crack! a groan, and the would-be spy staggered backward and fell heavily to the ground.

"I squealed," muttered Nat, "but I've got teeth left yet; and when I get out of here—if they don't kill me too quickly—God help some of them!" he added, grimly.

Nearer leaped the flames, and the heat drew the perspiration out on their foreheads in great beads; the air grew awfully hot, and every breath of it they drew seemed like a fiery stream passing down their throats.

"Let us go!" pleaded the messengers.

"You must stay until I go," was the stern reply.

Nearer—nearer, the little flickering, curling flames, the advance guards as it were, were playing around their very feet, and the smoke that before had been carried away through the broken windows, now arose in a volume about their heads, nearly choking them; they could not throw themselves on the floor, for the fire gave no place to do so; it was a choice then between fire, smoke, and death.

"Let us go!" gasped the messengers.

"Yes," said Nat, "I will! The time has come, we must desert the car, and mind you what I say: When we leave the car and jump to the ground, you must make a good fight, and if you have to die, let it be like men. But—if I find either of you sneaking—if God spares my life till then, I'll put a bullet in your brains. Now, understand! When I open the door, make a dash, jump to the ground, and pop away; you'll find enough work to do. Now!"

He swung open the door, and the two messengers jumped clean across the platform to the ground; they would have tried to run but for that dreaded voice close behind them:

"Fire!"

Crack—crack—crack!

Two wreckers fell; to Nat's surprise they had not been greeted by a volley when they flung open the door, but had stood still as statues, and even when aroused by the cracking of the revolvers and the falling of two of their number they did not return the compliment.

What did it mean?

Nat of course knew not of the advancing rescue, knew not that engine "30" was advancing to the rescue at fifty miles an hour; "30" had never before behaved as nobly as she did on that night, and just ere the door of the burning car was flung open, Captain Con had heard a far-away rumble; nearer and nearer it sounded, and like lightning it flashed upon the wreckers that rescue was coming, and in numbers so strong that they must flee; they watched for the headlight with startled eyes, and it dawned in their gaze even as the three cracks rang out on the air.

"D—— the luck!" howled Con; then shrieked: "Take to your heels, boys; make for cover lively."

They took his advice instantly, only stopping to fire some shots at the trio, who by the time the flight was commenced knew its cause and returned the fire with a shout of joy.

In one minute "30" dashed up to the spot, the citizens piled out and started an exciting chase, but a fruitless one, for knowing the wilds thoroughly, the wreckers were soon securely concealed.

A prompt effort succeeded in extracting from the fire the safe containing the bullion; Nat had been one of the foremost in this undertaking, and when he saw the safe on the ground, he cried:

"We fought against odds, but came out O. K!" then fainted and fell across it.

* * * * *

Caleb Dill, president of the Greenburg and Overton Railroad, was sitting in his private office the next day, when there entered a well-built, handsome-looking fellow about thirty; he was dressed in a general free-and-easy style, and every word and look breathed the character of a thorough-bred desperado.

"Well, Con," and Caleb Dill's fat face was broadened by a smirking smile, oh, so deceitful and disgusting. "Good luck?"

"No," was growled rather than spoken.

"Hoity-toity! What, do you mean to say you miscarried?"

"Yes."

"After all the trouble I took to get word to you and all that?"

"Yes; we'd a been all right but for one plucky little devil, and he got into the baggage car and kept us away as good as a regiment; we set fire to the car, and had just roasted 'em out, when up comes an express with a lot of fellows who gave us a lively chase."

This information was received with a string of sulphurous oaths of a yard or so in length, and when they were finished, Caleb Dill said:

"Well, Con, better luck next time, although I could shoot myself for letting Hernshaw get the best of me. Curse him!" and Dill clenched his hands until his fingernails sunk deep into his palms. "How I hate that man. I could murder him with a good conscience. But, ha—ha—ha—what he would give to know me—why, Con, between you and I, that man could waft me to the gallows with one puff of his breath. But I say, Con," he added, excitedly.

"What is it?"

"They say Hernshaw has a daughter that he cherishes like the apple of his eye."

"So I've heard."

"Could you steal her?"

"P'raps."

"Well, do so, and I'll give you a thousand dollars cash down."

"The job's as good as done. What do you want done with the gal, when we get her?"

"Oh, anything—anything—knock her in the head—make a plaything of her—drown her—hang her—anything."

CHAPTER III.

THE OIL TRAIN.

NAT was picked up and carried inside the car, where he was carefully propped up with cushions, and cold water being dashed in his face he soon recovered consciousness.

When the party was all gathered after having in vain pursued the wreckers, the barricade was removed from the track, the *debris* of the burned baggage and the mashed passenger-car was dragged aside, and then they undertook the sad duty of picking up the dead bodies of Jake Lockwood, brave old fellow, the conductor, and the single passenger who had dared face the perils of the journey.

The safe was also taken aboard, and then "30" ran through to Overton, arriving there some time after day-break, and Hernshaw had the satisfaction of seeing the bullion passed safely out of his hands.

Here also a doctor was procured who attended to Nat's wounds, after which he was taken on board and the train started on her back trip.

Nat was laid up a month with his wounds, but at no loss of time, for Mr. Hernshaw paid him regularly, and in addition gave him two hundred dollars as a reward for his bravery.

And during the time that Nat was laid up, great changes had taken place; old "49" was a complete wreck, and Hernshaw telegraphed east for another to take her place; but before she arrived it became a question as to whether they would ever have any use for her, as the wreckers, enraged at having been so badly beaten in that night attack, were now busily engaged in placing obstructions on the track in the daytime, in removing rails and various other devilish devices to interrupt the progress of trains or wreck them.

In vain Hernshaw invoked the aid of the law; it seemed powerless to reach the outlaws, and they dwelt in security and inflicted what damage they pleased with utter impunity.

It was near night; the last train from Overton was overdue; word came that it was wrecked; a misplaced rail, but so well arranged as to escape detection from the cab, had caused it.

The next morning a climax came, and just as Nat reached the workshop, the engineer of the morning express refused to risk his life in taking the train across the country to Overton.

Hernshaw, always at hand, called for a volunteer, but none responded.

Then he singled out different men and requested that they would fill the post, but each replied in the negative, and Hernshaw was in despair; just then there was a commotion, for from a siding connecting with the trunk road, of which the I. & O. R. R. was but a branch, there came grandly rolling a magnificent engine; every piece of brass was burnished like gold, and the iron work was both spotless and faultless.

"What a beauty," murmured Nat, and he was right; the engine was large and heavy, nearly double the weight they had used on the road before, but so perfect was her construction, that she could be handled as easily as a baby.

"Mr. Hernshaw!"

The gentleman started, and observing who it was that spoke, said kindly:

"Good morning, Nat, glad to see you out again. How are you feeling?"

"Well, sir, thank you," said Nat, his face wearing a vexed look as the president turned away.

"Mr. Hernshaw!"

"You want me?" and Mr. Hernshaw spoke rather sharply.

"Well, what is it?"

"I'll take that express train through if you'll give me

Rand McCormick for fireman and that new engine to run."

It was amusing to see the astounded look of Mr. Hernshaw at this proposal; it nearly took his breath away, and when he spoke it was with a gasp.

"You will?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who is Rand McCormick?"

"A young fellow now working in the machine shop. He wants to go on an engine and I'll be answerable for his doing his work properly."

"You will?" in still greater astonished tones.

"I will. Is it a bargain?"

"But—" catching his breath, "do you think you can run an engine?"

"If I didn't think so, why should I say so?" said Nat. "What is it, yes or no?"

"Well, really—I—that is—I hardly know—can't you wait until I can—think about—"

"No, sir," said Nat, promptly, but respectfully. "You want to send the train through; I offer to take it; *yes or no?*"

"Yes," gasped Hernshaw, so bewildered that he scarce knew what he was about.

But Nat took him at his word, and jumped aboard of the new engine, and relieved the driver who had brought her to the spot; he then sent for Rand McCormick, a young, noble-hearted Irish lad whom he thought much of, and ten minutes after regular starting time they sailed out of the depot.

It was grand, the first ride on the new engine, and Nat made up the lost time, and carried his train safely to Overton; when this was telegraphed back the other engineers professed their willingness to take their places in the cabs; Mr. Hernshaw wanted to exclude the driver of the express who had been the leader in the movement, but as he was supported by the other engineers, the president was forced to receive him back in his old place.

When Nat reached Insbruck on his back trip, it was to be given a bitter pill, for he had prided himself that henceforth he should run the express, a fact which would have highly pleased him; and learned, when he reached Insbruck, that the old engineer was to take his usual place.

"Is that so, Mr. Hernshaw?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Then I run the risk, and you reward him," said Nat, sorrowfully.

"No—no, Nat, not that," and then Mr. Hernshaw explained: "you shall keep the new engine, and run freight over the road, and the first vacancy on a passenger train you shall have, and shall take your engine with you."

"Thank you, sir—thank you," cried Nat. "But, sir, what name are you going to give the engine?"

"I hardly know."

"Then name her '49.' It'll put me in mind of the old engine, and Jake, he loved her so, poor fellow, and she mashed up and he dead," said Nat sadly.

"As you will," replied Mr. Hernshaw, and Nat skipped away as happy as a bird.

A week passed; Nat had been over the road a number of times, and so far had met with no accidents, and Hernshaw, who had slightly doubted the ability of one so young, began to have confidence in him.

Then business took a sudden rush, and the car sheds at Insbruck were blocked up with freight going west.

After Nat's terrible experience, Hernshaw scarcely liked asking him to take a second night trip, yet was compelled to by force of circumstances.

"Go," said Nat, when Hernshaw asked him, "of course I'll go. What's the freight?"

"A train of oil cars filled with petroleum."

"Very well; when shall we start?"

"It's eight o'clock now; how long will it take you to get your supper?"

"Half an hour."

"And Rand?"

"He'll be on hand."

"Say you start then at 8:30, and I'll telegraph ahead to have a clear track for you."

"All right;" and thus it was settled.

At 8:30 all was in readiness, and with Rand at the fire box and Nat at the throttle, "49" moved out of the yard, and started on her run of one hundred and fifty miles westward.

Engine "49" was a beauty, indeed, yet her beauty did not impair her for work, and Nat was accustomed to enthusiastically declare that:

"She can do more work than any seven engines west of the Mississippi."

They covered ground at a good rate, and soon they had scored half a hundred miles, and then every minute began bringing them nearer the spot where Nat had seen hot work, and as he left it behind, he thought:

"Those fellows have some secret way of finding out what our road is doing, and is going to do. They knew beforehand of the bullion behind old '49' the night she was wrecked. I wonder if they know that a train is out to-night?"

That was a pregnant question.

Did they know?

Yes; Caleb Dill had heard of the probability of a night train, and a fitting tool to so dastardly a master was even then lying in wait for the train at the "Clove," as a long and steep descent on the mountain side was called, and provided it was an *oil train*, he had *his instructions*.

The level stretch was passed and Nat breathed freer; they reached the top of the Clove going at the moderate rate of speed up the ascent by which the summit was reached.

And just on the summit, ere the descent was commenced, a dark figure leaped from the bushes, took a spring, caught the rear buffer of the last car, and swung himself on it.

"Down brakes!" came the order, and the brakemen put on the brakes, and then, knowing that they would not be shifted for some time to come, seated themselves on the lee side of the oil tanks.

Then the dark figure glided forward until it stood on the car next to the tender; then out came a small auger and a hole was bored in the wooden tank, from which then at once flowed a thick, dark liquid.

Striking a match in the shade of the tender, he touched it to the oil; at once there shot up a great, broad flame, but it failed to disclose the villain who had safely screened himself on the ledge of the tender's side.

"My God!" gasped Rand, "the train's on fire," and his face grew pale as death.

What was to be done?

Nat whistled "down brakes all," but the two brakemen were most sadly frightened, and could not stir.

Meanwhile the tank head was eaten through by the flames, and the burning masses of petroleum began rushing in fiery waves toward the tender.

"Rand!" cried Nat, quickly, "uncouple the car from the tender! Quick, or it will be too late! We must run ahead!"

Over the tender Rand clambered, and cast loose the couplings, and Nat shoved "49" ahead a little ways; but strange though it was, the oil-train began moving faster, and Nat was compelled to open the throttle, though they were going down a steep incline.

A brakeman's carelessness was the cause.

He had failed to secure the brake properly, and it gave way; and as the heavy train gained headway, it flew down the track like a flaming meteor.

Gazing backward, Nat saw one brakeman jump from the rear of the train, and then saw the other crouch for a leap for life; he took the leap, but it proved for *death!*

He fell beneath the wheels and two pairs of horrified eyes turned away, two hearts sickened, two frames shuddered.

Faster Nat sent "49" down the slope, and like some pursuing fiend, the oil-train increased its speed.

It was now a race for life, and Nat's face grew hard and rigid, and his fingers tightly clutched the throttle; if they could outrun the oil-cars they were safe; if they did not—they could but shudder at the prospect.

True, the engine had steam, but what was that compared with the great weight of the train that was momentarily giving it a most fearful momentum.

On—on—flew the locomotive, and after it came the burning train.

Nat turned on more steam.

The engine seemed to fairly groan, and bounded high from the track every minute as if about to leave it.

It was fearful.

More steam yet, oh! what a speed.

Nat's face was very calm, but his blood was in a tumult, the delirium of pace was on him; one minute of such excitement to him was worth a year of prosy life; more steam! he would win or die for it; and seeming in a dream, he looked from the cab window and saw the earth gliding from beneath him like a great black stretch of water.

"The oil train's gaining!" gasped Rand.

"Good Heaven, so it is!"

More steam; fearful was that ride.

It frightened one man, the author of the mischief, but putting on a bold face on the matter, he suddenly appeared, and stepping in the cab, leveled a pistol at the head of each of its occupants, and cried:

"Turn off the steam, or by — I'll blow your brains out!"

CHAPTER IV.

I'LL PUT 'EM THROUGH.

NAT and Rand were both greatly startled by the sudden appearance of the wretch, who, in carrying out the instructions that were to bring destruction on others, had placed his own head in death's noose, and for some seconds neither of the youths could speak.

"Turn off the steam!" yelled the villain. "D—— it, man, we'll be over the track into the gully if you go ahead at this rate. Turn off the steam! If you want to go the devil yourself you sha'n't murder me. Turn off the steam or I'll shoot."

Nat had by this time recovered his equanimity, and replied with the utmost *sang froid*:

"Now, just see here, that's a game two can play at," and drawing out his revolver, he leveled it at the villain's head. "I'm running this engine, and I'm going to do it just as I please, so keep yourself quiet or I'll administer you a leaden pill that'll make you feel sick. But who in thunder are you, anyway? How came you on board the train?"

These plain questions staggered the fellow for a minute, and then he faltered out, after evidently conjuring up an answer on the spur of the moment:

"I—I—was stealing a ride."

"You were."

"Yes."

"And do fellows who have no money to pay for rides, have the wherewithal to buy such revolvers as you carry? They're worth at least twenty dollars. What have you got to say for yourself?"

The villain made no reply, and Nat said, sternly:

"Now, my hearty, just you drop those pop-guns, and sit down quietly, or I'll put a hole in you big enough to see daylight through."

Thus adjured, and knowing full well that there was no fooling with Nat, the wretched man lowered his revolvers and squatted down on the floor of the cab.

Jerry was also provided with revolvers, and singing out: "Jerry, keep an eye on that fellow, and shoot him if he makes the first hostile move," Nat turned his attention to the burning train.

An exclamation of horror burst from his lips, for in the short space of time occupied by this little incident, the oil cars had gained amazingly, and were scarcely more than three hundred feet behind, and were now one mass of fire.

Nat opened the steam-valve a little now, and "49," fairly quivering, rushed down the heavy grade, bounding and jumping high from the track.

It seemed almost miraculous that she had not before this time jumped the rails, the doing of which meant total destruction in the rocky gully at the foot of the mountain side along which they were running.

Nat looked at the fiery, pursuing demon. It was gaining yet.

More steam, and then, great Heavens, what a pace they were going!

"I must keep ahead," groaned Nat. "It is sure death one way, possible life the other," and he opened wider the steam-valve, and under the new impetus "49" seemed fairly to fly.

And well it was that the young engineer put on this last touch, for it carried him ahead again, so that he was in safety when there came an immense upward-shooting flame, then a terrific report, and then the air was filled with sheets of flame in every direction. The fire had reached the interior of one of the tanks and it had burst, and doing so, the oil was sent flying in every quarter, alive and blazing.

In a minute another tank suffered the same fate, and then another, and its burning contents were flung far and near, and a part of it dropping among some dry, stunted brush on the mountain side, it took fire, and added greatly to the splendor of the dreadful scene.

On—on—on—the engine scurried, and on like the wind came the demon of fire; slowly but surely gaining again.

Nat opened the throttle to its widest, but "49" did not respond, and a glance at the gauge told the trouble; in watching the villain, Jerry's fires had run down, and now the steam was dropping.

The young engineer groaned as he comprehended the state of affairs, for he saw how useless it would be to attempt to raise the steam; so near was the burning train, that before a shovel full of coal was consumed, the meeting must come.

Letting go of the throttle for the first time, he folded his arms and awaited the result.

Nearer—nearer came the oil-cars, and slower "49" went every moment; the platforms of the oil-cars took fire, then the trucks, covered with oil, blazed up, and all semblance of a train was lost, and all that could be seen was one mass of moving flame, and that creeping slowly upon them.

Two minutes passed, they were not separated by a hundred feet; another minute, only fifty feet intervened; then forty, thirty, twenty.

"God help us!" groaned Nat. "If the cars would only jump the rails; it's our last chance."

Ten feet away; a few seconds and the burning oil must be flung all over the tender, and with that on fire it was dreadful to contemplate.

Inch by inch the distance was lessened, and then the cars struck; there came a hissing, and the tender was covered with the flaming oil, and the wood piled up in the rear at once took fire.

But though this was unfortunate, the meeting proved a blessing, for the shock of coming together imparted a momentum to the engine that carried it ahead of the burning train, which Nat observed to commence wobbling wildly; this continued for a minute, and then the foremost car jumped the track, and ran over the edge of the precipice.

Oh, what a moment of suspense that was to Nat.

If the coupling broke, and the rest of the train were permitted to come on, absolute death stared them in the face; if the coupling held, the rest of the train would be drawn over, and they would be comparatively safe.

There arose a squeaking and groaning of joints of wood and iron, then a rough, horrible grating, and the suspended car was dragged along the rough edge of the rocky, jagged precipice; and then—happy event—the second car left the rails, and then there came one convulsive movement of the snake-like line of flame, and the entire train took one gigantic leap and fell far through space into the rocky confines below.

One foe was out of the way, but there was another to dispose of—the burning tender.

“Keep a sharp eye on the fellow, Rand,” sang out Nat, and then bounded through the cab door and upon the tender, fought his way through the flames to the brake, seized it and put it hard on; there arose a harsh, grating sound, and their dreadful pace was lessened; one more turn of the brake wheel, then back through the flames, a leap into the cab, a quick movement, and the engine was uncoupled, and shooting ahead, the tender was standing nearly motionless, to be consumed by the flames.

This last heroic action of Nat’s had placed them in safety, and when this was certain, each one of the trio breathed a deep sigh of relief.

What should be done?

Nat quickly decided; they had water enough in the boiler to run them through to Overton, so there they would go.

The level was reached, Rand fixed his fires as best he could, and supplied the missing fuel by the use of grease and machinery oil.

Meanwhile a close watch was kept on their villanous companion, who remained quiet, nor made any movement until the level having been crossed, Nat slowed up before entering a deep cut.

At this point the fellow suddenly arose to his feet, knocked Rand down, and took a flying leap from the cab to the track, and then with a couple of Nat’s bullets whizzing about his ears, dove into the underbrush and disappeared; knowing it would be useless to attempt following him, in conjunction with the fact that they must make the best of their time if they wanted to reach Overton, induced Nat to keep right on, and in half an hour he sailed into the depot, and telegraphed back an account of what had happened; Alexander Hernshaw read the dispatch, and ground his teeth, saying:

“By all that’s holy this thing must stop. I’ll kill the whole nest of vipers or get killed myself.”

But he was outlining a fight against greater odds than he imagined.

Supplied with another tender, Nat returned to Insbruck in the early morning, stopping only long enough with the men he took with him to remove the few fragments that were left of the tender he had deserted.

Hernshaw collected the citizens again, ran out to the spot infested by the train-wreckers, but after a full day’s useless search for them he returned to Insbruck, disheartened and discouraged.

A week passed; the train-wreckers growing bold, halted a train in broad daylight, and robbed the passengers, and the express car; the next day they did the same thing, and resistance being shown, committed murders wholesale.

This was the climax; no engineer could be found to take a train across the road; Hernshaw was wild with despair.

“Will no one take a train to Overton?” he cried. “Are you all cowards?”

“No, sir,” said a voice.

Mr. Hernshaw turned; it was Nat Norwood who spoke; the railroad president’s eyes lighted up, and he glanced askance at the youth who stood proudly erect with arms folded.

“Let me follow a plan of my own,” said Nat, “and I’ll put ’em through.”

“What is your plan?”

“If I can speak to you privately, I’ll explain it,” was the reply.

Soon they were closeted together.

Nat’s plan was simply to secretly send on board, as passengers, about a dozen daring men thoroughly armed, and give him charge of them.

“I’ll do it!” cried Hernshaw, “and give you five hundred dollars to open the road again.”

“Shall I get up steam?” asked Nat, ignoring Hernshaw’s allusion to the reward.

Half an hour later Nat stood in the cab of “49,” and speeding over the road, glanced back at the train entrusted to his care, and again he said:

“I’ll put ’em through.”

Armed with rifles, in the forward car, were a dozen men, who had instructions to remain under cover until they heard three whistles; then they were to dash to the opened windows and blaze away.

They reached the part of the road where trains were usually stopped, and as Nat had expected, he observed at last a huge barricade across the track; in pretended ignorance of its presence, he kept straight on until he was within a few hundred yards of it, and then bringing the train to a standstill for a minute, he commenced backing down; but then came a signal from the conductor; the train-wreckers had already barricaded the track in their rear, and they could neither advance nor go back.

Then it was that with a tremendous yell, the bushes gave up their inmates, and fully forty or fifty men rushed out of their place of concealment; straight towards the train they made; nearer and nearer they came; Nat seized the cord attached to the whistle; the right moment came, and he gave the three toots agreed upon as a signal; the waiting men jumped to the windows, and ere the astonished wreckers could understand what was going on, twelve rifles had belched forth their fire and smoke and death-dealing missiles, and more than one of the murdering devils bit the dust; the rest halted short, broke and fled; a few minutes and back they came, but twelve reloaded rifles proved too much for them, and again they broke and ran, nor did they return to make any further attempt on the train, which was backed to the rear barricade, the timbers of which were taken on board; the barricade in front was also removed, and the train was rushed through to Overton, where her coming was hailed with delight, and Hernshaw, seated in his office at Insbruck, was overjoyed at the first train which had gone safely through in some days.

Nat ran back that afternoon, nor was he halted the entire distance, the wreckers evidently having gotten enough for one day.

A revolution in the working of the road at once took place, and Nat was given the most responsible engineering, that of running the morning express.

CHAPTER V.

SYNDIE HERNSHAW.

ALEXANDER HERNSHAW’S residence was one of the most beautiful in Insbruck, standing on the river bank, with a smooth, broad lawn, extending to the water’s edge; it faced the road that ran parallel with the river.

Hernshaw had spent much money in beautifying his grounds, and a neat wall of masonry ran along the river front.

Overhanging the water was a neat boat-house, and in one place a short flight of steps led to a little stone landing-place of just the proper height to nicely step in or out of a boat.

This was built for the special accommodation of his only child, a daughter of seventeen, known as Syndie, who was very fond of rowing.

It was just sundown of a lovely day, when Syndie ordered John, the man-of-all-work, to bring her boat to the landing.

John did as he was bidden, and light as a fawn, Syndie sprang into the little boat which had been made for her especial use, and seating herself on the thwarts, she took up the oars.

"Going far, miss?" asked John, respectfully.

"No, not very. Why?"

"The sun's gone down, and 'tain't exactly safe for you to be on the river much later than that."

"Pshaw!" said Syndie. "Why, it'll be a lovely moon-light night. There, you can see the moon now," and she pointed upward toward the just visible new moon.

"'Twon't last more'n an hour," said John, warningly.

"Well, I'll be back by that time," was Syndie's reply, as she dipped the blades into the water and sent the light boat swiftly into the stream.

It was just cool enough to suit the gay and beautiful girl, and turning the prow of her boat up stream, she pulled steadily but slowly, and as she went, drank in the beauties that surrounded her, and admired much the effects, as the roseate hues of the departed sun gave way to the silvery shimmer of the moon.

She rowed onward, never thinking that the minutes were fleeting, nor did she bethink herself of her promise to be back in an hour, till she chanced to behold the silver crescent just about to dip below the horizon.

"Ah!" she said, using that most feminine ejaculation applied to everything. "I must get home as quick as I can; papa may be worried; I believe he told me, too, never to go on the water after sundown. I'm sorry, of course, that I disobeyed him, but I know I can beg off."

Yes, Syndie could "beg off" anything, for Alexander Hernshaw fairly worshiped his daughter.

Syndie turned the boat's prow down the stream and gave way with a will, nor did she pause, except now and then to turn her graceful head for a moment to see if the road was clear.

She noticed a yacht with sails spread like a snowy cloud, dancing over the water in her direction, and turned her boat a little aside to let it go clear of her, then bent to her oars again, murmuring:

"This is glorious. This wind is just the salt of rowing, and it nevers springs up till after sundown. I'll tell papa that!" she concluded, and then glanced over her shoulder. The yacht was still bearing down on her; she changed her course, rowed a minute or two and looked again; the yacht was now very near and still headed toward her; what could it mean?"

She turned at right angles, but after several minutes' rowing, she saw that the yacht had been headed anew, and was within thirty or forty feet of her, and then gave way again.

"Port your helm a little," came the low order that reached her ears, and the yacht was brought about to answer to her new direction.

She plied her oars with all her strength, but could not escape, for the distance was being rapidly filled up; nearer and nearer the craft came; Syndie made one desperate effort to escape, and then, thoroughly alarmed by the strangeness of the yacht's actions, she cried for help.

Some distance up stream was visible a small boat containing the figure of a man; at the cry he turned, and in the waning light saw what was happening.

"You infernal land-lubbers," he yelled, "port your helm or you'll run the lady down. Row, young lady, row!"

Syndie spasmodically took several strokes, and then giving up in despair, once more cried for help.

"Port your helm! Port, hard down!"

But the yacht bore straight down on the row boat.

"By Heaven, I believe they're running her down inten-

tionally!" exclaimed the witness of the affair, and he gave way with a will.

"Stand by, Dick," said a low voice on board the yacht, "and yank her on deck when she gets under the bows."

In despair Syndie dropped the oars and jumped to her feet when the yacht was within ten feet of her, and clasping her hands, awaited what was to come.

The stem of the vessel glided past, and then her little cockle-shell of a boat was swamped beneath the swell of the bows, and she at the same moment was seized and dragged on deck.

"Help—help!" she screamed.

The man who was hurrying to her rescue saw it all, and quickly exerting his strength, the oars bent nearly double in his grasp.

He was not far off, and a dozen strokes would place him beside the yacht.

They were taken.

He saw the vessel gliding past him, took one tremendous stroke, jumped to his feet, sprang into the bows and grasped at the rail of the quarter-deck, and exclaiming "Thank God!" he obtained a good hold.

A quick movement, his boat was drawn up, and grasping the painter in his hand, he sprang on the yacht's deck, just as a voice said:

"Clap a hand on the girl's mouth, Dick, and chuck her into the hold."

The blood was boiling in the veins of the rescuer, and when he saw the girl vainly struggling in the grasp of the villain Dick, he dropped the painter, sprang forward like a panther, and the next moment Dick was sprawling on the deck; but he had not conquered yet, for two men came up from the tiny cabin, and rushed furiously upon him.

He fought a good fight, but finding himself pressed, he cried:

"Jump into the water, girl!"

"I can't swim."

"Jump! I will save you!" he said, firmly and decidedly.

For an instant the girl hesitated; it was asking a great deal of her to place so much confidence in a stranger; she hesitated.

"Jump!"

A rapidly rising confidence decided her, and just as he floored one of his antagonists by a blow, and turned to meet the other who held an upraised knife in his hand, the girl jumped overboard.

A quick upward motion of his arm saved the rescuer's life, but left a fearful gash behind, where the knife cut deep into the flesh of his arm.

Crowded hard, he dared not turn to jump, but running rapidly backward, his heels struck the low railing and he fell into the water; recovering himself, he struck out for the sinking girl, and caught her about the waist with one hand.

"Put your hand on my shoulder," he said. "Keep cool and you're safe."

Syndie gave herself up to his will completely, and as the yacht bore away, the brave fellow struck out toward where his boat was drifting; the yacht came about and made for him, but he had reached his boat, had placed the girl in it, and was seated at the oars ere they came anywhere near, and then, strong and expert with the oars, he kept out of her way until the nearing of several other small boats made the neighborhood a hot one for the would-be abductors, who, putting up the helm, bore away, cursing their luck roundly.

Syndie's rescuer pulled down the river until he had reached the landing-place, where she alighted, wet and shivering.

"Won't you come into the house?" she asked, "you are soaking wet."

"No," was the reply, and he backed out a little from the landing.

"But what is your name?" she asked, "I want to tell papa."

"My name's of no account. Good night," and turning his boat, it took but a few strokes to take him beyond Syndie's vision, who, wondering at the young man's strangeness, turned and walked towards the house, meeting her anxious father on the way to the landing.

He heard Syndie's story with gravity, and from it realized that he was in the midst of foes who were seeking to destroy his family as well as his railroad.

* * * * *

Caleb Dill sat in his office, mentally cursing. He was impatient, that was clear, for he was expecting somebody.

The man's history is told in a few words. Thief, desperado, horse-thief, gambler, blackleg, dealer in stocks as a speculator, a lucky venture, owner of controlling amount of stock in G. & O. R. R., president, a man of assumed respectability, but inwardly of a black and hellish nature.

The door opened, a man entered.

Caleb Dill looked up, his cheeks flushed. He started in surprise, turned pale, gasped:

"Jimmy Bolton."

"The same," was the mocking reply of the newcomer, a man of thirty, fair-complexioned, but the owner of a most sinister look. "I had a good deal of trouble, but I piked you at last, and here I am."

During this speech, Dill had recovered himself, and in a collected voice, asked:

"When did you get out?"

"A month or so ago. I've been lookin' for you ever since."

"How'd you like Joliet?"

"Didn't like it for a d—n. Well, pard, you're well fixed here, president of a railroad; I suppose you'll make me your private secretary!"

"No."

"You don't mean that, do you? But you must give me a soft position. Understand? You know me," he finished, with threatening tones.

"You shall have a job," said Dill, quailing before his companion's sharp glance. "I'll fix you all right if——"

The door opened and Brian Conway and Dick Klinck entered.

Dill saw at a glance what their tale would be, but said, interrogatively:

"Well?"

Brian looked at Bolton.

"Oh, go ahead," said Bolton, "don't mind me. I understand it all."

This was said in an off-hand way, and Bryan hearing no word of dissent from Dill, said, in a sour voice:

"We failed."

"How?"

"A fellow jumped aboard after we'd got the girl, and got her away."

"Who was the fellow?"

"It's the fellow that's running engine '49,'" said Dick Klinck. "Leastways, he was running her the night I fired the train."

"Ah!" ejaculated Dill. "That fellow must be got out of the way."

"Fact," said Bryan. "It's the same fellow that's got away with so many of the boys."

"What's his name—do you know?"

"Yes; he's called Nat Norwood," said Brian.

"Nat Norwood!" echoed Bolton. "Is he out here?"

"I don't know whether it's the same fellow as you mean, but Nat Norwood's the name of the young fellow that runs '49' on the other road."

"What kind of a looking fellow is he?"

Brian gave a short description.

"How old is he?"

"About twenty one."

"Then I say, too, that *he must die!*" and then the quartette laid their heads together to form a plan to encompass the destruction of Nat Norwood.

CHAPTER VI.

NAT DISAPPEARS.

A FEW words here as to the relations to each other of the I. & O. R. R. and the G. & O. R. R.

Each road made Overton its terminus; the road running from Greenburgh had been first established, and had paid handsome dividends at all times; a year before the opening of our story, the I. & O. R. R. had commenced operations; this road started, as you are already aware, from Insbruck, a station on the main road of which both were appendages, situated eighteen miles north of Greenburgh; freight coming south, of course, would be shipped over the shortest road, and passengers also preferred the short road, as it saved several hours in reaching Overton.

The Greenburgh road was familiarly known as the "old road," while that which Hernshaw represented was known as the "new."

The "new road" had not been in operation a week, when its effect was felt by the Greenburgh road, of which Caleb Dill was president.

Gradually but surely traffic went to the new road, and Dill found himself losing money, instead of making it, which was to him the great desideratum, and to obtain which he was willing to go to any lengths.

As we have said, he was all that was bad, and his wicked brain conceived a scheme by which he hoped to quash the rival road. Through Brian Conway, an old pal and a noted desperado, he had engaged in his employ a large gang of horse-thieves and general outlaws and murderers, whose business it was to be to destroy the trains of the I. & O. R. R., whenever they could safely do it, and harass them in all possible ways.

And another of his moves was to cut down the wages of all the employees of the road, on the plea that the new line was killing him; this of course created a bitter feeling against the new road and its servants, and more than once the two sets of men had been engaged in bloody battles in the streets of Overton.

And then again, as we have seen from a remark of Dill's, Hernshaw held the man's life in his grasp; Dill for some private reason hated Hernshaw with all the strength of his vile nature, and had he got the chance would have killed him with savage pleasure in the deed.

And this was the reason that the trains of the I. & O. R.

R., had been destroyed and their engineers and attendants, murdered; *they were in the pay of the other road.*

Hernshaw knew that the old road was never troubled, and half suspected the truth, but of course could never get a single atom of proof to corroborate it.

We have seen how nearly Dill's plans had succeeded, and the road would doubtless have been forced to cease operations but for Nat's pluck in coming forward twice when every other man had refused take a train across the road.

He was given the morning express, much to the disgust of the other engine driver, who, like the dog in the manger, did not want to or dare take it himself and yet would have debarred anybody else from taking it.

The next morning "49" steamed out of the round house, hooked on the express train, and at the signal dashed away at the rate of over thirty miles an hour.

It was an exciting pace, one that Ned gloried in; on they dashed, ten miles gone in a very short while, twenty left behind very quickly, then thirty, forty, fifty, seventy, ninety.

They mounted the slope, and descended the grade down which "49" had fled before the burning oil train; here they struck a level space of over ten miles in length, and at this point the single tracks of both railroads ran side by side, so near in fact, that leaning from a window of either train, you could have touched the other; in this close proximity the two tracks ran until just before the cut was reached where Dick Klinck had jumped from the cab of "49," after knocking down Rand McCormick; and here the old road crossed the new and made a detour around the base of the hill through which the new road cut.

On this level stretch, this first morning of Nat's running the express, he met the similar train of the other road.

A race of course was in order, and at first the Greenburg engine, "90," forged ahead; Rand's fires having fallen a little, made this so; jumping into the fire-box he threw on coal and wood, and opened the damper.

The steam jumped at once, and "49" mended her pace, and slowly drew up alongside of "90," on board the latter they were urging their fires to the utmost, and a big black cloud of smoke told Nat that they were throwing grease into the furnace; but he stuck to wood and coal, and kept the throttle well in hand; on—on, they sped, neck and neck; on—on! over five miles, and neither had gained an inch; on—on! until the crossing was in sight.

Then Nat turned on the half turn of the throttle which he had reserved, and "49" leaped ahead amid the cheers of her passengers, and slipped over the crossing with a hundred feet to spare.

The engineer of "90" cursed up hill and down, and swore to beat "49" yet.

They met at the same place next day, and again Nat came off victorious.

Engineer "90," as Nat had dubbed him, smiled grimly; he would fix Nat yet.

They met the next day; Nat held on to his usual tactics, and held back until the crossing was in sight; he turned on the reserve, but "49" did not gain an inch; "90" kept right up.

"Something's wrong," muttered Nat, and then a cry of surprise from Rand saluted his ears.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Just see here."

Nat looked; engineer "90" had attached to his locomotive a heavy rope; in the loose end of this was a heavy iron hook, and this had surreptitiously been hooked on the brass standard of "49," to which flags are sometimes attached.

"The sneak!" cried Nat. "Rand, go out and throw off the rope."

Swinging out of the cab, Rand made his way along the boiler to the standard and seized hold of the hook.

"Drop that!" yelled engineer "90."

"Go to blazes!" retorted Rand.

"By God, if you touch that rope I'll shoot you!" cried the angry engineer.

"Nat!" cried Rand.

"Ay—ay!"

"Got your revolver there?"

"Yes."

"Well, this fellow's going to shoot me. All I ask is to give him the same. Got him sighted?"

"Yes."

"Then here goes! Ease up a little."

Nat slowed "49," the rope slacked. Rand seized the hook.

"Hands off, or I'll put a bullet through your skull."

"Go on, Rand. And as for you, you dirty skunk, you'll never live one minute after you fire at Rand, for I've got a bead on you, and *I never fail!* Off with it, Rand!"

Engineer "90" quailed; Rand picked up the iron hook, flung it off, and engineer "90" slunk back in his cab out of sight, and Nat, putting on steam, cleared the crossing with ten feet to spare.

There had been no deviltry in a week; Hernshaw began to hope all was quieted down; a heavy freight was waiting to go through, and Nat was called on to take it through at night.

He did not back out, but hooked on after doing his day's work, and started.

Half way between Insbruck and Overton the water ran low, and he decided to halt at a watering tank built for just such occasions.

They stopped, and Nat, descending to the ground walked around his engine and commenced examining the journals.

The tank was full, the pipe was thrown off, and Rand looked around for Nat; not seeing him, he called his name, but got no response; then he grew alarmed and made a search for him, but searching and calling were of no avail, for Nat had disappeared as completely as though swallowed up by the earth.

What had become of him so suddenly and silently?

CHAPTER VII.

RAND TURNS DETECTIVE.

IN vain did Rand McCormick call Nat's name, for no response came.

But the trainmen, hearing Rand's calls, came forward to learn what had happened.

"What's the matter?" he was asked.

"Nat's gone," was all the reply he gave to numberless queries of the same nature.

"Where?" was the next question, to which his invariable reply was:

"I don't know."

Leaving several of the brakemen to care for the train and Rand to take care of the engine, a search was instituted by the conductor, who took the lead, lantern in hand.

They extended their search through a circle of several hundred yards all about the train, but found no trace of him, nor heard his voice even so much as whisper a reply to their frequent calls.

Fully half an hour they expended in the search, and then they returned and gathered in a little cluster near the engine.

Rand felt the loss, perhaps, more keenly than any of them, and kept hopping on the engine to look at the water, and steam, and fires, and then to the ground, where he paced excitedly to and fro, until the return of the searching party, when he cried:

"Did you find him?"

"No."

Rand groaned, and muttered:

"Oh! what shall we do?"

The conductor was perhaps the coolest of them all, and seeking to find some possible solution of the mystery, asked:

"Where did you see Nat last?"

"Bending down beside the driving wheel; he was feeling if the journal was hot."

"He didn't speak to you after that?"

"No."

"Nor you didn't see him?"

"No."

The conductor was stumped; he did not know what to do; lantern in hand, he stooped and looked under the engine, thinking possibly Nat might have crawled under it; but no, nothing but what should be there met his gaze.

Then where had Nat gone?

He certainly would not have gone in this way voluntarily; if not, then his going was *involuntarily*, and that meant *foul play*!

This was what struck the conductor, and was the proper clew.

Holding the lantern close to the ground, he examined, most carefully, the soft soil for ten feet each side of the track, and finally found—foot-prints.

This in itself was not so much, but coupled with Nat's disappearance, might mean a great deal. The conductor traced them right up to the engine, and here the earth was disturbed as though by a person being thrown from his feet, while he had tried his best to remain on them. Then the toes pointed the other way, as if they had all left the proximity of the engine.

The conductor and several of the train men, revolvers ready for use, followed up the trail for some distance, until the soil, changing from its soft nature to one hard and sterile, the footprints no longer were visible.

Thwarted they certainly were. They had to some extent solved Nat's fate, but yet knew not all. Nothing more could be done, and so they all sadly returned.

"Can you run the engine?" the conductor asked Rand.

"Yes," said Rand, sadly. "Nat used to teach me how, and told me the other day that I could do it almost as well as he could."

"Very well; we will try it. There's no use staying here, and we must get on. All aboard!" he cried, and added: "I'll stay in the cab with you."

The furnace doors were closed, and Rand turned on the steam. The heavy driving wheels spun around, then caught hold, and "49," Nat's pet, moved slowly away and left him to his fate.

When the fires needed attention, the conductor took his place at the cab window while Rand attended to them, and worked thus, the train reached Overton without further incident or accident.

Here a competent engineer was engaged to run the engine back to Insbruck, where they arrived late in the forenoon of the next day.

Mr. Hernshaw was at the depot.

"What made you so late in getting back?" he asked the conductor. "I had to send another engine out with the morning express. What happened you?"

"We met with an accident."

"What is it?"

"The loss of Nat Norwood."

"What do you mean? How? Explain yourself."

Mr. Hernshaw was soon put in possession of the facts, and expressed much genuine sorrow over Nat's loss, and began revolving in his mind the practicability of a pursuit of those who had kidnapped him, by a large, armed force.

Mr. Hernshaw felt it a duty to do something to this end, for, in Nat's being carried away, he could only see a blow aimed at himself. Filled with these thoughts, he referred the conductor to the superintendent's office for orders.

He sent for the county sheriff, but this individual, when he heard of what Hernshaw proposed, only laughed and said:

"It would be useless, sir, for they have most likely killed the lad before this!"

"Killed him?" gasped Hernshaw. "Good God! no; they would not kill him on my account."

"They would on his own, though, for his being the means of sending many a one of 'em into Kingdom Come; they must hate him like pisen!"

"But if they wanted to kill him they would have shot him down instead of carrying him away," urged Hernshaw, who hung on to hope as long as there remained even one straw to catch.

"Perhaps they had reasons to do so," said the sheriff. "But depend upon it, he's dead afore this time, and even if he wasn't, a mounted regiment couldn't get him away from them ere fellers. They make their home in different passes in the mountains, and fortify 'em, too."

And so Hernshaw, though much against his will, gave up the idea of rescuing Nat from his captors, who, he believed, of course, were the same outlaws or devils who had directed their malice toward him for months past.

And so "49" had a new driver placed in her cab, though Rand remained as fireman, and showed his loyalty to his former superior by hanging Nat's picture in a conspicuous place; the picture had been given him at his request, and

Rand set great store by it, and many times a day would he glance at it and mutter:

"Poor Nat—poor Nat!"

It was the second morning after Nat's disappearance, that Mr. Hernshaw appeared at the depot with his daughter Syndie, whom he was going to accompany to Overton; Hernshaw, after Syndie's narrow escape, would not let her go anywhere out of doors without his company, and in his heart he longed to know who her preserver was.

The express was ready to start, and "49" was hooked on.

Syndie knew the engine and had heard the story of its missing engineer.

A fancy to see the inside of it, to ride in the cab, seized her, and she cried:

"Oh, papa, quick, before they start; will you take me on the engine."

"If you wish it," and Mr. Hernshaw, with a pleasant greeting to the new engineer and Rand, assisted her into the cab, where a seat was brushed clean and a coat spread for her to sit on.

She watched the people, who, always behind, as some are, were rushing frantically to get their places before the train started.

A toot of the whistle, a ringing of the bell, they were going.

She watched the ground speed by her, until she grew tired, and then for the first time began curiously looking around the cab.

Her eyes fell on Nat's picture, she started quickly, looked at it with close scrutiny, and then cried:

"Papa, who is that?" but without giving her father time to reply, said, rapidly and excitedly, "I know him; I know his face; it's the young man that rescued me. Who is it?"

"Nat Norwood."

Hernshaw then muttered to himself: "Brave fellow, how much I owe him. God be merciful to him," in a tone of humble entreaty to that Great Being who rules over all.

And much need had Nat Norwood for all such aspirations at that time, for he was in a most deadly extremity.

"But you said he was wounded," said Hernshaw to Syndie.

"So he was," she replied; "I saw the blood."

Rand had overheard this, and a happy smile illumined his face, for he was pleased to know of Nat's brave action.

"I didn't observe it on him," murmured Hernshaw. "Rand," turning to him, "had you any reason to think that Nat had been wounded lately?"

"He never told me so, sir," said Rand; "but he carried one arm dreadfully stiff; and when he struck it once or twice, I saw him wince."

"The noble fellow!" cried Hernshaw; "and as modest as he is noble. Something must be done—*shall be done*, to find out what has become of him. I'll hire detectives, since force is of no use; I'll put them on the trail as soon as we get to Overton."

"If you please, sir."

Mr. Hernshaw had almost forgotten the presence of anyone else, and had addressed these words to himself; but, at

the humble "if you please, sir!" he faced Rand, who stood before him, cap in hand.

"What is it, Rand?"

"I should like to be one of those detectives."

"You should? But you have had no experience."

"I can gain it."

"But you might get your experience too late," said Hernshaw.

"You can put others at the same work; they may be successful if I fail—but I won't fail!"

"Why not?"

"Because, sir, he was kind to a poor outcast; because he did for me what none other has; because, sir, *I loved him!*"

"And so do I!"

It was Syndie who spoke, and her lustrous black eyes were filled with tears, as were also those of Rand; but his were not so from fear of the dangers to come, but because of the recollections of the past that crowded his brain.

"And so do I," repeated Syndie, looking steadfastly at the blue eyes that seemed to smile tenderly at her from the picture. "Give me this. Is it yours?"

"Yes," said Rand. "I'll not give it to you, but you may keep it for me until I get back from my hunt; if I never come back, it is yours."

At first, Mr. Hernshaw had seemed about to stop Syndie, when she repeated her exclamation, the first utterance of which had greatly surprised him, but changing his mind, he remained a silent spectator of what followed.

They reached Overton, and in the depot there, Mr. Hernshaw warmly shook Rand by the hand and wished him God-speed.

And Rand left the depot with these words on his lips:

"Now to find my first and only friend; if he is alive I'll find him and rescue him, or *I'll die with him, so help me God!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE OLD WELL.

Now let us see what really became of Nat on the night of his sudden disappearance.

As the reader will imagine, it was to some extent the result of a conclave held in Cabel Dill's office a short time before, at which his death had been determined upon, and as will be remembered, none desired it more than Jimmy Bolton, who had entered Dill's office much to the latter's disgust.

When they were alone, Dill and Bolton, the former said:

"You have some private reason for wanting the young engineer out of the way."

"Well, what of that?" was the lazily-toned reply.

"Nothing, particularly, only if we are going to play into each other's hands we should put confidence in each other."

"Yes, as you did in me," sneeringly said Bolton. "You promised to buy me out of Joliet, to meet me on my release; you kept faith prettily, I must say! But no matter, I've found you and I mean to stick to you. As to confidence, why do you want to steal this girl you spoke of? Why do you want to kill this Nat Norwood?"

"In stealing the girl, I strike my rival, Hershaw, a heavy blow; I want this Nat out of the way, because the other railroad would have stopped before this only for his d——d pluck!"

"How so?"

"The 'mountain men,' as they call themselves, had wrecked a train or two, and murdered a few engineers; not a man could be found to take a train through until this Nat stepped in."

"Then you are in league with these 'mountain men'?"

"No, I didn't say so, and I ain't," said Dill, quickly.

"But you are, else why play into their hands by killing this boy? Bah! Dill, you can't gull me! Where's your confidence now! Come, confess."

"Well," said Dill, sulkily, "I suppose you'll find out anyhow. Yes, then, I'm in league with these fellows to this extent; I pay them for intimidating the other road, and keep them free from all raids by occasional sums placed in the hands of county officials. But only two of 'em, this Brian and Klinck ever came inside of the office, and they suppose me to be O. K. except as regards getting rid of my rival."

"Ah, I see. They think you an upright Christian, a spotless church-member, except as regards this rival railroad?"

"Yes."

"And in the town you pass as an honest man, a person of integrity, principle and worth, in short, as a very desirable member of society."

"Exactly."

"Haw—haw—haw! That's good; just to think! The horse-thief, bank-breaker, highway robber, blackleg, gambler, turned into a man of integrity and worth, and an ornament to society; haw—haw—haw!"

"Be quiet!" said Dill, sharply. "Your own safety demands it as well as my own. Now why do you wish Nat out of the way?"

"Simply because I owe him a grudge. That cuss once sent me to prison for two years," Bolton replied, without hesitation, but in a way that carried no conviction with it, and Dill, though forced to accept the explanation, did not believe one word of it.

"I'm strapped," said Bolton. "Can you let me have about an even hundred for present necessities?"

"Yes; just sign a receipt for the amount on account of one year's salary."

This formula, altogether unnecessary, was gone through with much gravity, and Bolton pocketed the hundred dollars, and bidding Dill adieu, went to a hotel and there registered, and took rooms under an assumed name.

Next day he sauntered into the office, and there found Brian and Klinck, who had not yet left town.

With the former of the two Bolton at once struck up a friendship, and when this had been cemented by a few drinks of whiskey, it was agreed that Bolton should accompany them to their mountain fastness.

Recovering from their drunk, they took passage on the train for a little station opposite their rendezvous, but six or seven miles south of it, which distance they were of necessity to travel on foot.

They reached this station after dark, and taking their

time, were just about to cross the track of the I. & O. R. R. when the sound of an approaching train struck their hearing.

They were but a short distance from the watering place at which "49" stopped that night, and hurrying thus far they threw themselves flat on the ground, on the side of the track opposite that where stood the water funnel.

Contrary to their expectations, but in accordance with their desires, the train stopped, and when they recognized "49," they chuckled for joy.

They could make no offensive move, and so laid and waited the tide of events.

Fate played into their hands, and they could hardly restrain themselves as they saw Nat examining the wheels on the opposite side of the engine, and they arose to their feet when Nat crossed in front; he saw them not, intent as he was always when working around an engine, and was entirely unprepared for defense when a pair of hands was laid on either shoulder, and another was clasped across his mouth.

As they attempted to bear him down by their weight, he planted his feet firmly, and struggled desperately against it, and this was the cause of the torn-up patch of earth which had first attracted the conductor's attention.

Then he felt the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against his head, and a voice, that of Bolton, hissed:

"Be quiet now or you'll get an ounce of cold lead in your skull."

In vain Nat struggled against his fate; his whole soul revolted against allowing himself to be quietly led like an ox to the shambles, yet fate was inexorable, and go he must.

He heard the calling of his name, but could not answer because of that stifling hand over his mouth, and when, as he was led further away and the cries became more and more faint, he shuddered and felt that he was losing his last hold on the world.

His captors maintained silence as they led him along toward the now distinctly outlined mountains.

What would be his fate? Why had he been thus borne forcibly away?

Thus Nat questioned himself, but all to no purpose, until at length it dawned upon him that it was due to the enmity of the outlaws to him who had braved them so often.

He thought of "49;" would she reach Overton in safety? And, truth to tell, he was as concerned about the engine as himself.

At last Bolton spoke, and it solved at once in Nat's mind the fate intended for him.

"What shall we do with this chap?"

"That's for you to say," replied Brian.

"I go for drawin' and quarterin' him," growled Klinck, who well remembered when he had been obliged to cower before Nat.

"What's that?" suddenly asked Bolton, pointing a little to one side.

"That?" said Brian. "Oh, you mean that shanty; there used to be a farmer living there, but for some reason he couldn't keep a horse, or a cow, a pig, or even chickens, so he pulled up stakes and left."

"Good!" said Bolton. "I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll bind this fellow hand and foot, fasten him in the shanty and set it on fire. How's that?" he cried, exultantly.

"First-rate!" and his companion laughed with fiendish glee, while the helpless victim for the sacrifice shuddered with horror.

As they crossed the little yard which had surrounded the shanty, Brian said:

"Be careful that you don't tumble into an old well that's thereabouts."

"An old well?" said Bolton.

"Yes."

"Find it."

"Well, here 'tis. What do you want of it?"

"Instead of roasting the kid, we'll chuck him into the well, and then fill it up with dirt. He'll die slower that way than by fire and suffer more," he added, malevolently. "Pick him up and let him have the use of his lungs; they won't do him any good."

They jerked him from his feet and bore him toward the well, whose black mouth could be seen some feet away. The curbing was gone, leaving the well level with the ground. Nat struggled as only a man can when he sees death so near and inevitable. But it was utterly useless, and the cold chills that swept his frame raced the faster as, held above the well, he saw several large snakes crawl over its edge and glide away in the darkness.

"In with him!" cried Bolton.

A swinging motion, and then Nat was pitched headlong into the well. Straight down he went, head first, a heavy splash, and he struck the water, and then his head struck something hard, which, but for the water breaking the force of his descent, must have killed him outright.

His presence of mind remained, and he struggled until he stood on his feet with the water up to his waist; something cold and slimy struck against his hand, and then he heard a continuous hissing that struck terror into his soul; another clammy object touched him, and he knew it was a snake; he felt a sharp, sudden sting on his leg, then another in his side, another—another and another.

Half frenzied, he plunged madly toward the side of the well and clutched at it with his hands.

On the prairie land in which this well was sunk stones are as scarce as hens' teeth, unless they be brought from the mountains, and this well, in common with others, had its sides built of boards which stood perpendicularly.

In clutching at the side his fingers struck into a crack between two boards, and locking his fingers on the edge of one he gave a desperate wrench; a splinter of it two inches wide and three feet long broke off, and with this he commenced beating the water's surface, while the hisses arose louder and angrier.

"Haw—haw—haw!" laughed Bolton, "I do believe he's found snakes down there," and every word cut to Nat's very breast. "But come, let's chuck in the dirt," and then the earth began to descend in showers.

But Nat continued his battle with the snakes, and finally silenced all hissing, and then leaning back, wiped the perspiration from his brow with his sleeve.

He heard them speaking.

"Here's some logs I found; chuck 'em in; if one of 'em strikes him atop of his cocoanut, it's all day with him."

Nat groaned, for he had no means of sheltering himself, and narrowly escaped death the next instant, for a huge knot of timber just shaved his head ere it stuck the water and splashed it high up the sides.

Then another came, and it struck his hand, seeming to splinter the bones of his entire arm.

In his despair he inserted his fingers once more in the crack whence he split the splinter, the better to keep close to one side; but to his horror, he had hardly clutched it when he felt it giving way slowly; then its top went over with a sudden jerk and struck the opposite side; then he realized that it formed a screen for him, and uttered a low cry of gladness, as, a heavy log striking on it, it saved his life; then another plank, loosened by the loss of its fellow, tumbled across, and thus was followed by still another.

The logs used up, and supposing Nat dead from his silence, the trio of devils now were contented with assuring themselves that if alive he could never get out, by industriously throwing loose earth into the well; Nat had hoped that they would go, and groaned as he saw his only means of escape cut off.

The trio worked with a will, and soon were able to see from the top the height to which the dirt had mounted, and deeming their work sufficiently well done, they gave vent to a hearty guffaw, each note of which pierced Nat like a knife.

"They've cut off all chance of escape," he moaned. "Ah!" he felt a queer, puffy sensation in body and limb; his head reeled, his brain swam, and borne down with desperation, murmured, "It's just as well, for these snakes have finished me," and then hope gone, he gave himself up to his bitter thoughts, while his limbs and body were swelling with inflammation.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

RAND ON THE TRAIL.

RAND MCCORMICK loved Nat Norwood as few human beings love each other. Later it may transpire how this love was born, and how it grew and thrived, but it is enough for the present to know that Rand paid Nat an unceasing devotion—not anything servile or slavish, but an open, frank affection.

And if Rand had not gained in bravery by knowing Nat, it at any rate had been developed by constant companionship with him, so that when Rand took the oath we have quoted, it was not the mere ring of empty words. They had meaning in them.

Yet, though this was so, he little guessed how difficult it would be to carry out even one tithe of what he swore, nor knew how fearful a struggle he was to undergo in Fighting Against Odds.

He left the depot, hopeful that he would speedily solve the mystery of Nat's disappearance, little dreaming that even then his mission was known—that even then plans were being laid to trip up his first step in the affair.

Yet such was the case.

Dick Klinck had already visited Dill, and informed him that Nat was safely out of the way, and from Greenburgh had gone through to Overton. At this place he was always somewhat careful as to his identity, as once upon a time he had been engaged there in a little transaction that had pleased the citizens to such a degree that had he been caught he might have swung by his neck. He had sauntered to the depot of the I. & O. R. R., and was there when the express came in. He saw and recognized Hershaw and his daughter, and without appearing to be dodging them, managed to get close enough to overhear their conversation.

He saw Rand approach, and managed to catch the purport of what he said.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, mentally. "So he is going to hunt up Nat; he won't find him, that's certain, though I don't doubt he's a dangerous devil, and had better be taken care of. They shake hands! Um, he's going, is he? Well, my boy, Rand, they call you, I think, I'll take care of you," and Klinck followed the fireman out of the depot.

The first thing for Rand to do was to decide upon a plan to follow.

After musing awhile, during which he walked up the main street of Overton, he thought:

"That's what I'll do; I'll change my clothes, disguise myself a little, and then follow the track on foot back to where Nat disappeared; if I meet one of those outlaws I'll play sweet on him, and if I've got to, I'll join the gang and help them steal horses if necessary, to learn Nat's fate."

Such was Rand's devotion.

He entered a second-hand clothing store and bargaining for, bought a suit of clothes, while Klinck, on the opposite side of the street, waited for him to reappear.

When he did, Klinck, for a minute or so, hardly recognized him, so great a change had been effected in his general appearance.

Instead of a jaunty cap, Rand now wore a black slouch hat; in place of the blue flannel shirt he wore a red one; a pair of corduroy pants stuck into the tops of his boots; a sort of pea-jacket completed the rough costume, one whose *tout ensemble* was well fitting the character of a western rough.

This was the precise effect desired by Rand, and he had gained it.

He lost no time, having once decided on his course, and left the town at a swinging pace.

The track was his footpath until he reached the spot where the Overton end of the tunnel came out from under the hill; at first he intended going through the tunnel and cut, but it struck him how dangerous this proceeding would be, as there was no means of escape should a train pass through before he reached the other end, so he determined to cross the rough, steep hill.

He clambered up the rocks with an activity born of his resolve to discover the mystery surrounding Nat; he never dreamed of pursuit, and not turning to look back, did not see Klinck.

Rand pushed on in hopes of reaching the level ground beyond the hill before dark, warned to speed by the low, declining sun.

The sun had gone down, and darkness was gathering ere he saw the plain below him.

He hurried on, but finally came to a dead halt, for in the darkness he had gone somewhat astray, and when he stopped it was just in time to save himself from falling headlong into the cut, on whose very edge he now stood.

Klinck, unaware that he had halted, followed on, and never saw him until but twenty or thirty feet separated them.

Rand heard a noise and turned around, but Klinck had dropped to the ground and remained undiscovered; Rand was about to leave the spot, when he heard a faint rumble far away, low, indistinct.

Then it grew louder, more continuous, rising and falling.

"It's a train coming," muttered Rand. "I'll stay and see it pass," and facing the direction of the train, with mind wrapped in reflection, he waited its coming.

Nearer and nearer it came, and the low rumble swelled to mimic thunder, covering up the noise made by Klinck as he approached Rand from behind.

Had Rand turned then he would have seen him, for the moon, just rising, shed its pale light over the scene.

The train was but a hundred feet away.

Rand was caught about the waist, lifted up and hurled downward, to be ground to pieces beneath the wheels of the rushing train.

CHAPTER II.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

It is impossible to conceive how a human being, born innocent and pure as the driven snow, can ever reach that awful stage in which bloodshed becomes a delight, and cold-blooded murder is committed with feelings of exultation.

That such changes from the purity of babyhood to the moral wretchedness of the murderer take place, we know by the annals of everyday life, and have seen it exemplified when we saw Dick Klinck steal up behind Rand McCormick to hurl him from the top of the cutting beneath the very wheels of the oncoming train.

A sudden violent shove, Rand fell, and Klinck gave utterance to an exultant chuckle.

So unexpected was it all that Rand hardly realized that a hand had been laid on him, when he felt himself falling.

At such times a person can crowd years of reflection in less than a single second.

So it was on the present occasion, and in one single instant Rand's imagination had painted the picture of himself crushed to a jelly beneath the wheels of the cars.

He uttered one shrill cry of agony, and then clutched wildly about for something to stay his downward progress; falling—falling—oh! how fast—the glaring light flashed upon him—the roar of the wheels thundered in his ears—the fiendish laugh of Dick Klinck added its horror to the scene.

His fingers struck upon a spur of rock, but the momentum almost tore loose his slender hold.

"Help me, oh, God!" he cried, and clasped his free hand on another rough projection.

Then he heard the sharp command of the whistle to "down brakes," and knew that the engineer had seen him; but he knew that the train could not be stopped in such a short distance, knew that his only chance for life was in holding on until it had passed beneath him.

Could he do this?

"Yes, if left alone, but this he speedily knew he would not be, for Dick Klinck's fiendish chuckling was now brought to a speedy close, and Rand heard him cursing roundly.

The blood-thirsty villain was not going to be balked of his prey if he could help it, and stooping down he began searching for a heavy stone; this it did not take him long to find, and with one in his hands, Klinck bounded to the edge of the cutting, and balancing the heavy missile, aimed it at Rand's head.

Rand saw the movement, and his heart jumped into his throat, and caused his breath to come short, quick and strangling; he felt as if suffocating; everything began to grow misty and dark before his eyes; he turned his agonized face towards Klinck, and cried:

"Mercy—mercy! as you hope for mercy in time to come!"

The only reply was a cruel laugh, and when the locomotive was not more than thirty or forty feet away, the heavy stone struck Ralph's hands, deadening all feeling in them, literally killing their nerves for the time, and making them like the hands of a dead man; they no longer retained their hold, but gradually slipped away.

Rand realized the peril of his situation, a groan welled up from his heart, and then—he fell!

Fell, striking the cab of the engine, was flung against the side of the cut, from which he bounded back and struck the ground lengthwise within an inch of the wheels; in fact, one arm fell partially on the rail, and the wheels passed over the loose part of his coat sleeve and took up just a little bit of the flesh; the weight of the cars, the small extent of flesh, produced the feeling of a hard pinch magnified thousands of times, the pain produced being excruciating beyond description.

At first Rand would have snatched his arm away, but he dared not, for the least movement, a stir of half an inch, would have encompassed his destruction; had he raised his head ever so little, his skull would have been stove in by the trucks; had he attempted to roll over, and thus raised his side, it would have been crushed; to have drawn up his arm would have thrown his elbow under the wheels, and to have had his arm cut off clean; so, though his brain reeled with the agony he was enduring, he kept perfectly still; he sunk his teeth into his upper lip and bit until the blood came, and then shutting his eyes tightly, he lay there and let wheel after wheel pass over the crushed flesh; it was suffering of the most horrible nature, but Rand accepted it like a hero—yet, oh! how he wished the long train was past.

Pass it did at last, and Rand, aching in every bone and muscle, arose weakly to his feet, tottered a moment, and then his brain darkened, he sank in a heap, unconscious.

The engineer finally brought the train to a stop, then backed up a short way, not so far that he would run any risk of running over the poor fellow whom he had seen fall, and whose fate he dreaded to ascertain.

Lantern in hand, he hastened back, and when he found that the person lay several feet from the track, he uttered a glad cry.

"Let's have a look at him," he said, and held the lantern so that its rays fell full on Rand's face.

An ejaculation of surprise, then he exclaimed: "It's Rand McCormick! How does he chance to be here? Is he dead?"

They could not tell, yet feared so, for the face was pale and blanched, and the limbs were motionless, and when raised, fell like logs.

They picked him up and carried him forward, and soon were speeding on to Overton, leaving behind the exultant Dick Klinck, who, witnessing their carrying the unconscious form, took it for granted that his unholy work had been done completely.

"Ha—ha—ha! Both of 'em out of the way now. That'll be good news for the boys, 'cause they were both dangerous fellows," and laughing softly to himself, he pursued his onward way.

The train bearing Rand rushed into Overton behind time, and was met there by Alexander Hernshaw, who was going to return to Insbruck by a train that was to start immediately after the arrival of the freight.

He was conducted to where Rand was lying, and while an employee was hurrying for a physician, Hernshaw sorrowfully watched over the unconscious lad.

"Poor fellow," he muttered. "To be thus disposed of ere the pursuit had been hardly begun."

The fact caused many serious thoughts on Hernshaw's part, for it revealed to him how strong, subtle and numerous his enemies must be to have thus so quickly discovered Rand's mission, and to have so effectually defeated it.

"They do not hesitate at murder," he murmured. "It's a fight against odds—fearful odds."

And he was right to the letter.

A physician soon put in an appearance, and as he looked rather grave, Hernshaw postponed his going back to Insbruck until the next morning, and remained beside Rand.

"Is his life in danger?" he asked.

"I don't know," was the reply. "I must examine him first."

When the examination was concluded the physician looked relieved, and said:

"There is no danger whatever, I am happy to say. He is bruised quite badly, and has suffered a severe mental strain; that is all, and he will be all right in a few hours."

Rand's injured hands were dressed, and the dreadfully mutilated piece of flesh on his arm was partially excised by the doctor's advice, after which it was also dressed and bandaged; when this was done the proper remedies were applied, and soon Rand was restored to consciousness, and when he eagerly inquired as to his condition, and received the cheerful intelligence that he would be sound and whole within a week, his joy was intense, and at the time when he was enjoying a refreshing sleep, Dick Klinck, much mistaken, was detailing the circumstances of Rand's supposed death.

The doctor's words were more than prophetic, for in less than a week Rand was himself again, except, perhaps, for a slight stiffness of his arm and fingers, the abraded parts having nearly healed.

He then turned his thoughts to the mission he had devoted himself to, and obtaining some coloring matter, he darkened his face so that it was the color of a gipsy's, and then rigged himself out in a costume to convey the impression that he was such.

Thus disguised, he thought it impossible for anyone to recognize him, even the person who had penetrated his previous disguise.

He took the train this time instead of going on foot, and left it at the water tank where Nat had disappeared; it was late at night when he left the train, but he struck off towards the hills, and by a little after daybreak he was well up in the mountain.

Finally he stepped into a little clearing from out of a dense growth of bushes, and an instant afterward he heard the ominous click of a musket lock; he turned to dive into the bushes, but too late. A gruff voice cried:

"Stop right there! I've got a squint on you, and if you stir I'll let her fly!"

Rand stopped, and facing around, saw what he had not before seen; a little hut standing at one edge of the clearing, with three men before the door; one had a bead on him, while the other two looked curiously on; they had been engaged in skinning a deer when Rand interrupted the operation by entering the clearing.

"Well, what want you?" asked Rand, adopting, so to say, a backward way of talking, to better carry out the character he had assumed.

"Want to know what you're doin' here?" was the gruff reply.

"Nothin'," said Rand.

"Oh, out for pleasure? Well, won't you come and breakfast with us?" and Rand saw a covert threat in the words.

"Much obliged; of course I will," and advancing, he helped prepare the meal of deer meat, coffee, corn bread and potatoes, nor did he exhibit the agitation he felt at the sight of one of the men whom he recognized as a hard character, by whose side he had worked in the machine shop, nor did he show that he noticed the fellow's sharp glances at himself.

Breakfast over, Rand got up, coolly picked his teeth with his knife, and then sauntering slowly around the clearing, dived among the bushes, only to be confronted ere he had gone twenty steps, by the man he most dreaded.

"Taking French leave, was you?" said the fellow, with a sneer; "perhaps it was a good thing for you to do to save your mutton."

"Why so?" said Rand, coolly.

"Because I know you, and I'll get a couple of hundred for putting you out of the way."

"Know me?" said Rand, "who am I?"

"You are Rand McCormick. Is my knowledge good?"

"Yes," was the reply; a quick movement, a sudden spring with the knife in hand which Rand drove home, saying: "So good that it costs you your life," and the villain fell a corpse.

A crashing in the bushes, "h—l and d—nation!" and then Rand was called on to fight for life.

CHAPTER III.

NAT NORWOOD.

THE agony of mind experienced by Nat Norwood as he felt his body and limbs slowly swelling, was as frightful and intense as human mind could have borne without having passed within the bounds of insanity.

He felt of his legs; they were swelled up until the skin was drawn tense and the flesh seemed about to burst its covering, cold sweat started from every pore of the unsubmerged part of his body, which, too, was tense with that terrible inflammation which was firing his very blood.

"God have mercy on me," he wailed, and tottering back, leaned his shoulder against the side of the well and struggled hard to keep upright, for his knees shook and trembled, and momentarily grew weaker.

His enemies were gone, indeed, a fact which at first he had hailed with gladness, but now began to as bitterly bewail; and crying aloud, he begged them to come back and put him out of his anguish, which, to tell the truth, was more mental than physical; just as the condemned criminal frequently suffers a dozen deaths, though supplied with every comfort, and well physically, before the day of execution comes; thus it was with Nat; feeling death a certainty, he naturally would shrink a little; but it was not death in itself that had such horrors for him, it was the manner in which it came.

He felt that he was suffering a living death!

"Kind Father in Heaven spare me!" he moaned; "let me die without these horrible agonies."

The perspiration passed away, his skin became hot and feverish, his muscles began to acquire a strange rigidity; his blood seemed to be on fire, and his head began to whirl around like a top, while everything grew hazy and indistinct; he tried to move his hand and arm, but they seemed weighted with lead, and his head grew heavy and seemed desirous of falling forward.

"Is this death?" moaned Nat. "It is more frightful than ever I dreamed it."

Then came a sensation of drifting away, slowly but perceptibly the rigidity increased, and his brain was darkened, and then all became a blank to Nat; and could the reader have penetrated the depths of that well half an hour later, it would have been to see a figure that, motionless and deathlike, stood stiff and cold against the well's side.

Was this really death?

Let us see.

Seven or eight hours have passed since Nat was thrown into the well.

We penetrate its interior once more.

The face which before was red with inflammation and puffed out, has shrunk to its natural size and grown paler.

The stiffness of the figure's position had changed, and now it leans with a careless grace in every outline.

In all, it looks like a figure that, being dead, has just had breathed into it the breath of life.

A hand, before in a constrained position, silently glides into an easy one; then we see the knees quiver, bend, and then—splash—it has fallen into the water.

A splutter, a quick jump, a wild voice murmurs:

"Where am I? What means this darkness? Is this Heaven or hell?" and the figure straightening up, seeks, with strained eyes, to pierce the gloom.

A few minutes of wonderment on Nat's part, several exclamations of surprise, then he ejaculated:

"I thought I was dying, but surely I am alive; and this is the well I'm in."

Reason and intelligence had returned, and Nat was himself again.

The snakes which had bitten him so freely were only common water and black snakes, neither of which are poisonous enough to produce death; a single bite from either variety would cause a man no more trouble than a bee sting, yet let a hive of bees swarm upon a man and sting him freely, its effect would be that terrible swelling experienced by Nat, a lethargy, perhaps death; this latter would doubtless have been Nat's portion, had it not been for his standing nearly hip deep in water, and being surrounded by a cool atmosphere that tended to allay the inflammation.

It was enough for him that he was alive, and his joy knew no bounds when he satisfied himself that his awakening was not all a dream.

His limbs were stiff still, and his body was chilled through, yet these were regarded by him as minor evils, the latter of which he partially remedied by swinging his arms briskly.

As his blood warmed his spirits arose, and he began casting around in his mind for means of escape. He could think of no plan, yet so confident was he of escaping, that he muttered:

"And I warn all of you bloodthirsty wretches that my day of reckoning with you will make you howl for mercy."

It was well that Nat was bouyed up by some such strong hopes, for otherwise he must have been driven to desperation, through the very blueness of his situation. He spent hours in devising plans for escape, but was forced to reject every method ere it was hardly framed in thought, and at length even his hopeful nature was bent beneath the weight of the seriousness of his situation.

Hour after hour passed by, and long and dismal they could not but be to the young man imprisoned in the well so dark and gloomy, with hunger's pangs just making themselves known, with no means of escape visible. And who, besides, had but just awakened from almost death itself.

"There is no use thinking more," muttered Nat, at last. "It is time for action. Let's see if there isn't a hole to crawl out of in the upward direction."

He managed to crawl up the side of the well to where the boards had struck, but further he could not go; there were small spaces left between the rocks and logs thrown in by the villains who had planned his destruction, and it was by means of these interstices that air enough entered the well to support life; but to squeeze or crawl through them was impossible, and Nat was just preparing to drop back when he heard a sudden rushing sound, then a heavy thud, and a gurgling and splashing of the water.

He could not conjecture what had occurred, and waiting until all was quiet again he dropped down to make an examination; his descent was stopped far quicker than he expected, and in an instant he knew what had happened.

Where the lining had been removed the sand had caved in.

"Surely God is with me," cried Nat.

It truly seemed so, for had he not been up out of the way when the sand gave way, he must have been buried beneath it, and smothered to death.

Nat realized the truth of this, and his, indeed, was a thankful heart, although it soon changed to bitterness, for he said:

"Why should I be so glad to escape this, when it only outlines a more prolonged and terrible death—starvation!"

He threw himself down on the sand, and there lay for some minutes; then, quick as a flash he was on his feet and penetrated the hole left behind when the sand had caved; it was a deep hole, its direction was surfaceward, and—it solved the method of escape.

Like one mad, Nat wrenched loose a piece of board, penetrated to the back of the hole, and then began digging wildly into the soft sand; oh, how he made the sand fly, and how eagerly did he take the first upward step in the tunnel he was digging.

Faster—faster did his arms fly, yet never kept pace with his will; another foot upward was gained, another—another; an hour passed, two,

three, and still he kept on unflaggingly, and since starting he had tunneled out fifteen or twenty feet; calculating for the angle he was working at, Nat knew that he had not gone more than ten feet upward.

The air in the narrow place, fed from so poor a source as the well, itself poorly supplied with fresh air, forced Nat to crawl out of the tunnel and rest himself.

Half an hour later he was at it again, and he worked as only a man can when life depends on every muscle's movements.

The perspiration ran off in streams; his strength began to give way, but the brave heart that was beating within his bosom would listen to no such word as fail, and that only made his arms fly the faster, knowing the value of each fleeting second.

According to his calculations, he could not then be more than ten feet from the surface, possibly not that; but come what might, he resolved to dig straight through without a pause or break.

Half an hour more had winged its flight, when Nat was brought to a halt by hearing a thud: he listened, but it was gone almost as soon as heard; he quickly guessed its meaning by the greater closeness of the air he was breathing; it meant that the tunnel had caved in somewhere behind him; he could not go back; his only resource was to go ahead to freedom or—death!

How precious became the seconds then! each one was worth a drop of life-blood, and each drop of a man's life-blood is worth countless worlds.

Work—work—work—sand flying in all directions, working—working—while now the sweat of agony rolled from his forehead; working while the air grew heavy and fetid—working while each muscle was racked with its own peculiar pain; working when each drawn breath seemed like a mass of lead passing into his lungs; working while his brain was reeling with convulsions.

What countless years of agony he had suffered since he had been spirited away from his engine.

He tried to murmur a prayer, but the words died on his lips, and it only arose as a mental prayer.

Nat paused for a few seconds, and then renewed himself for the last grand effort; he knew that he could not depend on more than a couple minutes more of life in that place, and he resolved to make the best of them.

Good God! what a death struggle—what a battle of life was that!

Certainty of death within two minutes, the greatest uncertainty as to how far distant the surface was.

Most men would have lain down, given a gasp, and all would have been over.

Not so with Nat; as long as one ounce of strength remained he was going to use it.

Up—up—inch by inch: his brain was darkening, was clouding, as though a pall was descending on it; it was the same feeling as when he thought himself gliding into the valley of the dead; he was gasping—oh!—kind Heaven how bitter!—the piece of board fell from an unnerved hand.

Was all over? No; he grasped it as a drowning man clutches the straw, took one convulsive dig into the sand above him, and then—the cold air rushed in upon him, and his clouding eyes saw above, the star-spangled blue of Heaven's firmament.

It was just a small fissure he had made, but he tore it larger with his hands, and then poking his head through, sank back, and with his head pillowed on the surface, breathed, oh, how deeply!

He was safe!

Thus he laid for perhaps half an hour, and then, much refreshed, he made the hole large enough and crept out.

His hunger had become troublesome by this time, and seeing the deserted house near by, he approached it in hopes of finding provisions there, but instead found a horse there quietly munching some corn; Nat seized a handful and ate it greedily, meanwhile revolving in his mind what to do; a glance at the horse decided the question, and flinging himself on the steed's back, he caught up the reins and sent him flying towards Insbruck.

It was a long distance to Insbruck, but it was yet early in the night, and by pushing his horse he could reach there before the breaking of day.

The minutes fled rapidly, and no sound broke the stillness save the heavy breathing of the steed and the rapid footfalls.

Insbruck came in sight at last, and almost at the same time a faint glare caught Nat's eyes;

then a tongue of flame shooting upward; Nat spurred on, a fear curdling his blood as he drew nearer, and then his fears were realized; Andrew Hornshaw's house was in flames.

"My God!" gasped Nat, "is she in the house?" The flames rolled, the crowd surged, Nat saw borne past him, in an insensible condition, the form of Mr. Hornshaw, who had fought the flames in trying to reach his daughter's room, until they overcame him, and had he not been rescued he must have perished.

"The girl has not been seen; she must have been suffocated," some one said.

"It's a lie!" shrieked Nat, "I'll save her!" and into the burning building he rushed.

CHAPTER IV.

A DESPERATE LEAP.

RAND had been watched from the minute he arose from his breakfast, and while one of the trio had entered the bush, the other two had sat quietly where Rand left them.

When he dived into the bushes, both sprang to their feet. One said quickly:

"Jack, you stay here; I'll tend to his business."

"All right, Tim," was the reply, as he who had spoken first bounded across the opening toward where Rand had disappeared.

Tim reached the bushes, took a dive into them just in time to hear the words Rand used as he drove home his knife.

"D—nation!" shouted Tim, and in one single moment he had his revolver leveled at Rand's head, and it looked as if the brave fellow's search for his loved companion must end this time for good.

One quality that Rand possessed, was an agility and activity worthy of a panther, and this stood him in hand now.

Crouching as a panther would have done, he gave a loud, shrill cry that had the effect of causing Tim, for one moment, to relax the pressure he had already put on the trigger. That yell saved Rand's life, for before Tim could pull the trigger, Rand, by a forcible, upward stroke, sent the revolver flying, and then, quick as a flash of lightning, he buried his blood-dripping knife in Tim's breast. As the keen steel cut its way to the villain's heart, he uttered a blood-curdling cry of agony, and the next minute he lay beside his companion, a bleeding corpse!

Then Rand drew back a few steps, his heart jumping with excitement. Heavy footfalls broke upon his ear, and, like a hunted hare, he crouched down, and drawing his revolver, he cocked it with hands made steady only by force of will, for the hot blood of excitement was rushing, fire-like, through his veins.

For just a second or two, he thought how mean it was to shoot the new comer without giving him a chance for life, and then came a second thought:

"He'd serve me the same; surely it can be no sin to kill such a man, when he is hunting me."

He was ready and waiting. Jack showed his head, and Rand saw that in one hand he carried a huge knife, in the other a revolver. He heard him utter a cry of rage and amazement, and then cursing roundly, say:

"D—the fellow; I didn't like his looks. I'll cut his liver out if I lay my hands on him. Ah, ha! my boy, there you are," as he discovered Rand, and he leaped towards him.

Rand was waiting, and taking quick aim, fired—fired again to make sure, and Jack was stretched on the ground, a mass of quivering flesh, with two jets of blood spurting up like crimson fountains.

Rand trembled as he stood beside the bodies and wiped dry his crimson-colored blade, for the sight of so much death, and especially when dealt by his own hand, was horrifying to him.

"God forgive me," he said, fervently. "I would not do it except for duty's sake. My soul trembles with horror, but Nat—Nat, on earth or in Heaven, I will shed an ocean of such blood or find you. But I must get away from here. The neighborhood will be dangerous for me to be caught in," and turning his back on the place he ascended the mountain.

He traveled several miles, and then he saw lying before him a small, round, bowl-shaped valley, strewn in every quarter of which were rude huts, while around them he saw numbers of the vilest and most brutal looking men, the far-famed desperadoes and train-wreckers of the west.

He heard voices near him, and slunk into a dense thicket, in which he lay all day long; night had fallen when he again heard voices near him,

and he strained every nerve to catch what was said.

"It's all settled!"

"Yes; one of the boys has gone on horseback to the Devil's Gap; when the train passes there it always slows down, and he'll be able to smash the headlight; they can't see where they're going, of course, and the first thing they know they'll be in Devil's Race."

Rand shuddered, for this Devil's Race was a swift-flowing stream in a narrow, rocky gully, across which the railroad ran on a bridge; in the speaker's words he saw the whole plot; it was to destroy the bridge and allow the train to go crashing down upon the jagged rocks far below, and then to have the fragments swept away by the turbulent current.

"Then we are only to destroy the train?"

"That's all."

"It don't give us any pickings," in a grumbling tone.

"What's the odds so long's we get paid well for it. Them's orders," and they passed on.

Yes, Caleb Dill had resolved to make one bold effort to drive his rival out of the country, and at one of these infernal conferences in his office, a plot had been concocted the full hellishness of which future chapters will disclose.

When the speakers had gone, Rand was on his feet, yet so weighted was he by the horrors pictured by his heated imagination, that his legs felt weak and unsteady.

"They must mean the train that ought to pass at ten, as they have been doing lately," said Rand. "I must brace up; I have work before me; I must save that train, and I will, or die making the attempt!" and suiting action to word, he nerved himself for the work before him, and hurried down the mountain side, and had nearly reached the track, less than half a mile east of the Devil's Race, just as he heard the far-away rumble of wheels; he started on a run, and as he ran the train came thundering onward; once he heard the toot of a whistle, and knew it was that of "49."

Nearer and nearer sped both, and then Rand saw a dark body rush toward him; the headlight was gone; so far the devilish work of the train-wreckers had succeeded, and Rand groaned as he thought of his possible failure.

How could he arrest the train?

"God help me decide," he thought.

Nearer—nearer; would he reach the track in time? he pursed up his lips—he whistled, shrieked, but all was drowned in the thunder of the wheels.

Nearer—nearer. Good God! would he fail?

A thought flashed across his mind—a thought whose very peril caused his cheek to blanch; he remembered the brass standards on the cow-catcher frame; he would take a jump, catch one of them, and swing himself on board the engine.

Heavens, what a perilous task he laid out for himself! it would be but a mere chance leap in the dark, and if he missed—all that would remain of him would be a jelly-like mass of blood and bones; nearer—nearer, the train was opposite, he sprang; a moment's suspension in space, he caught the standard, was thrown violently around, his feet were thrown upward, his hands were wrenched loose, and he was hanging head downwards, only kept from being ground to death by the frail hold of his toes on the slides of the steam chest above the cylinder; he felt his frail hold give way, and a horrified shriek burst from his lips.

CHAPTER V.

THE WARNING.

As Rand McCormick's hands were wrenched loose from the standard, and as he dropped head downward, he uttered a shrill cry for help.

It penetrated within the cab and startled the engineer from his musings.

He waited, listened, then stuck his head out of the window.

"Help!" groaned Rand.

"My God!" exclaimed the engineer, as the appeal for help struck upon his ear, and his eyes being turned in the direction whence it came, met the blood-freezing sight of the youth, his feet having but an insecure hold, his head but several inches above the track, and but a few inches in front of the huge driving wheels, which, should he lose his hold, would inevitably crush his head and body to a jelly.

"My God!" exclaimed the engineer, and shrinking back, shaded his eyes with his hands to shut out the horrible sight.

And Rand?

He was undergoing torments of mind worthy of transpiring in hell itself.

First and foremost in his mind was the desire to save the train, and it was for this he had taken that desperate leap; for one single moment, while his hands still grasped the standard, he had exulted in anticipation of thwarting the devilish plans of the train-wreckers, but this had speedily been changed when he fell, and had naught between himself and destruction but the slender purchase of his toes on the machinery.

Just as the engineer stuck his head out of the cab window, Rand felt that his toes were slipping.

It was then that he groaned for help, knowing full well the horrible fate that awaited him unless it was speedily rendered.

Slipping—slipping—slipping!

It was a horrible sensation; slipping—not far at a time—only a fraction of an inch, yet, under the circumstances, it was more than ten feet might have been under others; slipping—slipping.

"God help me!" groaned Rand, for he saw no prospect ahead but death.

Slipping—slipping—"will I fail after all!" moaned Rand. "Will the warning I've risked so much for come too late?"

Slipping—slipping—"stop the train before you get to the Race," yelled Rand.

Slipped—slipping—"the bridge has been doctored," he shouted; "if you don't stop, you'll plunge into the gorge."

Rand's words floated into the cab, and to the engineer they seemed the voices of a dream; they possessed a strange influence over him, and in a swift but mechanical way he grasped the lever, and reversed the engine, at the same time whistling down brakes.

Slipping—slipping—a minute more, and all would be over with Rand.

The heavy train jerked and groaned, and went slower and slower.

Slipping—slipping.

Slower and slower and then a dead halt, just as Rand's last slender hold gave way, and he fell, his body outside the track, his head on the rail, not two inches in front of the huge wheels.

"Good God, how close!" thought Rand, and scrambling out of danger and to his feet, stood there trembling like a man with an attack of the ague.

It was not through fear that he trembled, but from a strange feeling that cannot be described, and can only be experienced when by the breadth of a hair a man has escaped absolute and certain death.

As the rough grinding of the brakes ceased, the engineer sprang to the ground, and turned a pair of horrified eyes to where he expected to see Rand's mangled body.

Instead, he saw Rand on his feet alive and well, and a great sigh of relief welled up from his heart, while his look of horror gave way to one of joy.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed.

"Do you know me?" asked Rand, stopping forward into the light that streamed from the just-opened furnace doors.

"Rand McCormick!" ejaculated the engineer.

"The same."

"But what are you doing here? How came you in that perilous position? and the memories the question brought back caused the engineer to shudder.

"I came to warn you of danger. The timbers of the bridge across Devil's Race have been sawed in two, and you would have fallen through into the gully had I not stopped you. I was coming to give you the signal, I saw the train about to pass, and I hazarded a jump; you know the rest. Go back, tell Mr. Hornshaw you saw me, but tell no one else, as it might be the cause of my death. Here comes the brakemen and conductor; I don't want them to see me. Good-night!" and facing quickly about, Rand dove into the darkness, and was swallowed up from sight.

"Who was that?" asked the conductor, as he came up.

"I don't know," was the reply of the engineer, carrying out Rand's instructions.

"Why did you stop?"

"The fellow stopped us to give us warning that the bridge across the Devil's Race has been fixed so's to let us down."

"Do you believe him?"

"Yes."

"It's mor'n I do. I believe it's one of the rascals; they've got a trap set for us somewhere behind. We'll go on regardless of his warning."

"No we won't," said the engineer.

"Why not?"

"Because I won't take the train another foot ahead."

"And I say the train shall go on."

"It will if you can run the engine," was the engineer's reply. "I know what I'm about, and if you kill yourself, and all the people on board by going ahead, the responsibility is yours, not mine."

The engineer's serious way of speaking convinced the conductor that he was in the wrong, and he consented that the train should run back to Insbruck.

The station master looked thunder-struck at seeing the train roll into the depot, and when he would have asked the cause found astonishment had for once made him tongue-tied.

"I want to see Mr. Hernshaw," said the engineer, and he was at once conducted into the president's private office, while a colored attendant departed to arouse the gentleman required.

In a few minutes Mr. Hernshaw appeared, and when the engineer first set eyes on him he started in amazement.

Was that really Mr. Hernshaw?

This was the first time the engineer had seen him since before the burning of his house, and the marked change in the president's appearance, his melancholy look, his head bowed in grief, caused the engineer's heart to overflow with sympathy for the stricken man.

"What has happened, Mr. Draper?" Mr. Hernshaw asked, in a melancholy voice.

In subdued tones, Draper, the engineer, related how he had met Rand, and the information given him as to the condition of the bridge.

As the engineer progressed in the relation of his story, the sad look in Hernshaw's eyes gave way to hard, pitiless glances, and when the recital was finished, he broke forth:

"Curses on the heads of the fiends! d—them all eternally! They seek to drive me from the field; they try to make me crazy; but my turn will come! We fight against odds, but I'll conquer yet. I'll fight fire with fire!"

"What shall we do with the bridge?" the engineer ventured to ask.

"You've got steam up yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then take a construction train there immediately. I'll order one made up."

The train was soon made up, and loaded with the necessary workmen, started for the bridge, arrived at which they found Rand's words true, for several of the principal supporting timbers were sawed nearly through.

In several hours everything was made as good and strong as before, by the means of props and braces, and the morning express ran across the bridge in safety, only half-an-hour behind time, carrying the passengers who had started on the night train, and who, learning how their lives had been saved, left a substantial testimonial in the hands of Mr. Hernshaw for the unknown person who had taken the desperate leap.

And where was Rand at this time?

Securely concealed in a dense thicket, listening to the conversation of Brian Conway's hyenas, who, cursing with savage fury, swore the most terrible vengeance on the person who had warned the engineer and saved the train.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ABDUCTION.

WE have before incidentally alluded to a meeting in the office of Caleb Dill, at which many devilish plots were unfolded; one of them was the destruction of a train through sawing the timbers of the bridge across Devil's Race.

We have seen how this was frustrated.

Let us now turn our attention to another piece of devilry decided on that night, which was more successfully carried out.

We mean the abduction of Syndie Hernshaw.

Brian Conway was, of course, the central figure in this undertaking, and he associated Dick Klinck and Sandy Bilkes with himself.

They betook themselves to Insbruck in the yacht which Brian had before used in an attempt to capture Syndie, frustrated, however, by Nat Norwood's timely presence.

In this they cruised up and down the river past Mr. Hernshaw's residence for several days, waiting only for a fitting opportunity for carrying their devilish plans into execution.

A second-class ball was to take place at Insbruck, and Klinck managed to learn that Hernshaw's domestics were to attend, leaving only father and daughter in the house.

This was exactly what the villains wanted; they could not have had things better if they had

had the making of them; they waited until late to assure themselves that both of the inmates of the house were asleep, then ran their craft up to a pier about three hundred yards up stream from Hernshaw's house, and here moored her.

They then skulked along the shore, and finally reaching Hernshaw's grounds, silently approached the house. The first thing to be done was to try the doors. Here, again, fortune favored them, for one of the servants, thinking it too much trouble to lock the door and carry the key, had left it unlocked so as to give her easy ingress.

How they chuckled to themselves over their good fortune as they stealthily entered the house.

They had located the probable position of Syndie's room, from the light that had early in the night gleamed out bright and strong, but which now burned faint, as if turned low.

Taking off their shoes, they cautiously mounted the stairs, crept slowly by the door of Hernshaw's room, and then along the hall until Syndie's room was reached.

Here they paused while Brian bent his head to the floor and listened.

He could hear the low, regular breathing that indicated sleep.

Arising, he slowly and carefully turned the knob, then waited. Still the same low, regular respiration, and they knew that their bird had not flown. Then Brian pushed onward an inch or so, then the same distance further, and still the girl slumbered on, unconscious of the nearness of deadly foes.

They entered the room, and advanced until they stood beside the bed and gazed down on the sleeper.

She lay in a position of easy grace, one hand lying across her breast, the other carelessly lying on the pillow above her head. Her fair, sweet face, so full of purity and innocence, was upturned towards theirs, and the closed eyes seemed fastened on theirs in reproach.

It is said that most people have warnings of impending danger.

Then Syndie, why do you sleep there so calmly? why lie there so dove-like when the fierce hawk, cruel and merciless, is prepared to clench you in his talons?

Wake—wake—a single cry, and your father will be at your side ready to defend you with his last drop of blood.

The villains glanced one at the other with glee, for she slept peacefully on, nor knew the danger that threatened her.

It had been decided, ere they entered the house, that she should be killed; straws had been drawn, and chance selected Dick Klinck to perform the murderous deed.

The wretch showed no signs of pity in his face as his hand drew forth the murderous weapon.

He loved murder for itself, the sight of blood was a feast to him, and no matter how pure, how innocent, how appealing the victim might be, he never failed to relentlessly drive home his blood-thirsty blade.

Klinck raised his knife above the innocently-sleeping form, and would have plunged it through Syndie's heart, had not Brian Conway stayed his hand.

"What's the matter?" whispered Klinck.

"I've not the heart to kill her," replied Brian.

"Let's carry her off instead."

"It's too risky," grumbled Klinck.

"Well," retorted Brian, "if you're afraid of the danger, just get out of the house, and Sandy and myself'll go through with it."

"I'm not afraid," growled Klinck. "You're boss here, and I'll do as you say."

So Syndie Hernshaw's life was saved; for what reason, the future will disclose.

"We'll have to gag and bind her," commenced Brian; then suddenly flung himself on the bed, and clasped a hand over the girl's mouth, for at that instant she had awakened, and Brian had discovered a pair of wondering, frightened eyes fastened on him.

"Here," he said, in a low voice; "help gag her, she's awake."

Klinck carelessly threw his knife on the bed, and whipped out a large handkerchief, with which Syndie was securely gagged.

At first Syndie was paralyzed with fear, but as she realized what was transpiring, her cheeks flushed with anger, and she struggled to a sitting position, and with a menacing attitude bade them defiance.

"Take her from the bed," said Brian, and Sandy, who was nearest, placed his arm around her for that purpose.

Like an awakened lioness, Syndie's eyes flashed with anger and resentment; she chanced to observe Klinck's knife, and seizing it she made

one wild pass at Sandy; an agonizing groan startled her into letting go her hold of the handle, and Sandy Bilkes fell across the bed, a corpse; the point had entered his eye and had penetrated his brain.

Completely unnerved, Syndie sank back and lay panting like a doe run to earth.

"There, I told you we'd a better 'ave knifed her," growled Klinck. "Shall I finish her now?"

"No, I'm goin' to take her with me," was the reply. "Come, give us a hand!" and then to Syndie, "mark you, my lass, if you make a bit of noise or try to escape, I'll cut your throat; hear?"

They lifted her from the bed, and Brian wrapped a shawl about her; then they led her into the hall, down the stairs, out of doors, and finally disposed of her in the cabin of the yacht.

"Here are your clothes," said Brian; "I brought 'em along, and you can put 'em on if you want to. I'm going to lock you in, and mind, no noise."

They went on deck, and Klinck returned to the house, while Brian dropped down stream to a place appointed for meeting.

Arrived at the house, Klinck fired it in half-a-dozen places, and beat a hasty retreat, and met his companion as agreed.

The first intimation Mr. Hernshaw had of the truth was when he was awakened by the noise of a tumult outside; he sprang out of bed, and noticed that the air was filled with smoke; hurrying on a part of his clothing he opened the door, and glancing into the hall, saw a mass of smoke, while here and there a little tongue of flame darted up.

"My daughter—my daughter!" he shrieked, and dashed toward her room, followed by several daring spirits who had entered the burning house. He had gone but a few steps when he was seen to stagger and fall. Those who followed at once picked him up and retreated with him, and this was the little procession Nat Norwood saw ere he dashed into the building. By instinct he seemed to know where Syndie's room was, and straight toward it he fought his way through the flames. When he reached the hall where Mr. Hernshaw had succumbed, he pulled off his coat, and wrapping up his head, sprang blindly forward, reached the open door of Syndie's room, bolted into it, and flung to the door which was already beginning to blaze.

A current of air setting toward the window, partially cleared the atmosphere, and he saw at once that Syndie was not there. Then he discovered the body of Sandy; saw the knife sticking in his eyeball, and drew it forth; he saw a name carved on the handle—KLINCK—and stuck the knife in a safe place for future use.

He started to leave the room, but recoiled when on opening the door he found the hall one mass of flames.

His only way of escape was by the window; he ran to it, threw up the sash, and groaned as he saw the ground below; to jump meant little short of death.

Meanwhile the flames advanced with the rapidity of lightning, and in one corner of the room the fire burst through the floor.

The crowd below yelled wildly in sympathy, and a perfect bedlam of shouted-out directions for him to follow arose on the air.

He glanced around the room like a hunted fox; his eyes fell on the bed, a glad cry escaped him; he jumped to it, snatched off a strong, stout blanket, bounded to the window, flung it to the ground, at the same moment speaking dumbly to the spectators by moving his hands.

They understood, and a dozen stout men seized the blanket and held it about three feet above the ground; they were some distance from the building, and looking up to where Nat stood, it seemed impossible that he could ever jump the distance and land safely in the blanket.

It was the only chance, however, and nothing remained but to try.

They were ready. Nat uttered a short prayer in silence, gathered himself, leaped boldly out, felt himself falling in space, heard a loud, confused cry of satisfaction, felt a heavy jar, and then all was a blank.

They carried him to a quiet nook by the river shore, where ten minutes later he recovered his consciousness. His head swam at first, but then it cleared, and the first thing he recollected was the name on the knife—KLINCK.

"Ha!" he cried, "I can guess it all now. Klinck—Klinck, the same that I rescued Syndie from before. They've abducted her; they may even now be murdering her. I'll go to the rescue; I'll track them all day and all night for years to come, but I'll wrest her away and punish the cowards. Syndie, I come—I come!" and

rising to his feet, he dashed away through the excited crowd unnoticed.

In an hour the house was in ashes.

Two days later a skeleton was exhumed from among the debris, a skeleton, charred and unrecognizable, and Alexander Hernshaw, bowed down with grief, buried it as that of his beloved daughter.

CHAPTER VII.

A BOLD MOVE.

ALEXANDER HERNSHAW set himself to thinking after the burial of the remains he supposed to be those of his daughter, and somehow he began to lay the cause of his misfortunes to the door of the G. & O. R. R. managers; as we know, he had long suspected that the rival road was in collusion with the train-wreckers, since the property of the G. & O. R. R. was never molested or damaged, while that of the I. & O. R. R. was never in safety.

He had a room fitted up for him in the depot building, and here he remained, planning, devising, thinking.

The more he thought over the matter, the more he became convinced that his house had been set on fire, and that by the order of the opposition road, who had hoped, perhaps, that this last cruel blow would drive him from the field.

But if this were so, they made a mistake in their man, for it aroused all the lion in Hernshaw's nature, and though from the weight of his recent grief he took no immediate steps, it was none the less sure or certain; in fact, each passing day saw him bear down his woe, while his indignation arose in accordance, and when news was brought him by Draper of the sawing of the Devil's Race bridge, he became dangerous; and when he gained the retirement of his own room, he raised one hand to Heaven, and in a heavy, mournful, but determined voice, he said:

"I'll have a bitter revenge on those devils, or die in executing it. You shall be doubly avenged, Syndie, I swear it by every drop they shed of your innocent blood!"

Having finished, he threw himself on the bed, and half an hour later obtained the first sleep that had visited his eyelids in many—many hours.

And Nat?

As most boys would express it, he had not been hurt, only "had the breath knocked out of him."

When his breath returned and his consciousness, he was as good as new, except for a few burns and blisters, and the singed appearance of his eyebrows and ends of his hair.

Once through the crowd he looked around for his horse; somebody had tied him to a fence not far distant.

Mounting, Nat rode off at a rapid pace, but slowed it to a walk when he noticed the animal's distress, his condition being truly pitiable after his forced ride over such a distance as he had traveled that night.

Once the thought struck Nat, "ought I not to show myself to Mr. Hernshaw?"

He half turned his horse's head, when he muttered:

"No; they all think me dead, and there's no use of me disproving it now, for I may be killed in this venture."

So he kept slowly on his way.

About four miles from Insbruck was a wayside inn; here he dismounted just after daylight, and had his horse attended to, while he himself entered the bar room, and ordered breakfast for himself to be served in a private room, whither he at once repaired and proceeded to cleanse himself.

While discussing his breakfast he had an opportunity of calmly thinking over the situation, and its result was that when he had finished he called the landlord and proposed to sell him the steed he had ridden the night before.

The landlord, as any one would naturally be, was rather chary of buying a horse from a stranger, but finally, as Nat offered the animal for twenty-five dollars in cash, an old suit of clothes and a wig the landlord had on, the Dutchman could not resist the temptation of the ownership of the horse, and said:

"Vell, I takes up your offer, but I no bees sure vat ev'ryding is sdraight, ain't it."

"Everything is straight, depend on it," said Nat; "now, the money, now the clothes and wig, and he is yours."

With some misgivings still, the Dutchman nevertheless handed over the money, and the other articles, in which Nat arrayed himself; and so complete a transformation did the rig make in

his appearance, that on seeing himself in the glass he remarked:

"I don't believe the old boy himself would know me."

Bidding adieu to the landlord, he returned to Insbruck in accordance with a plan he had matured, and from there went to Greenburgh, around whose railroad office he hung for several days, but without having the good fortune to learn anything decisive.

On the third day he saw enter the office a man whom he thought he recognized as the villain who had fired the oil train on the night of that terrible ride down the slope; he waited until he came out, and seeing him board a train, Nat muttered:

"I may be on a wrong clew, but I'm going to follow him up."

On board the train he managed to get where he could see the fellow, who, in reality, was Klinck, who had remained at Insbruck to do some dirty work for Dill, while Brian, with Syndie in charge, the same night of the fire, had gone forward by a train which left Greenburgh before daylight.

Nat watched him as a cat would a mouse, although not appearing to do so, and when he saw Klinck rise and prepare to leave the train at a spot where a little station was stuck among the bushes that lined either side of the track, he, too, arose, and gliding out of the car unnoticed, descended on the opposite side, and had concealed himself before the train passed onward.

He saw Klinck standing before the door of the station when the train was gone; Klinck watched until it was out of sight, then he abruptly turned and disappeared in a narrow path in the bushes.

Nat followed as close as he dared to, until Klinck, leaving the bushes, struck across the open plain towards the mountains; when a hill-lock hid him from view, Nat followed, and so successfully dogged the villain's footsteps, that when Klinck passed the portals of the bowl-shaped hollow where this nest of vipers lived, he was only a few hundred feet behind.

He dared not enter the valley of Devil's Punch Bowl—as some of the vile crew had named it—so he remained ensconced in the bushes while the sun sunk in the western heaven.

When it was gone and twilight came, and then the dusk of night, Nat emerged from his concealment, and only stopping to loosen his revolvers and knife, he boldly entered.

He was going to beard the lion in his den.

No one noticed or questioned him, for all were engaged in riotous drinking, and not men alone, for here and there could be discerned the outline of some representative of the female sex, drinking as much and swearing as hard as the ill-favored specimens of the male sex.

The sight sickened Nat's heart, and but for the purpose which actuated him, he would have fled this hell-hole as a startled deer does the hounds.

A crowd of half a dozen staggered by, and he heard one addressed as Captain Con.

"Ah-ha!" he thought, "now for it."

Con was drunk, and they were taking him to his hut, whither Nat dogged them, and then locating it, he retreated out of sight; he kept his concealment until the orgie had ceased, and then he sallied forth with teeth set and heart bounding within his breast.

He was going to make a bold move.

Not satisfied with penetrating into the den, he was going to carry its master away.

Straight to Captain Con's hut he made his way, and hesitating but a moment he pushed open the door and entered.

Brian Conway, sleeping soundly under the effects of the rum he had drunk, did not awaken at sound of the intruder's footsteps.

Nat drew his pistol, cocked it, and crawled to the sleeper's side; his foot struck something, and picking up the article, he found it to be a pair of handcuffs; a glad cry escaped him, and quick as thought he snapped them on Captain Con's wrists.

The ruffian awoke with a start, and he was convulsed with fear to find the cold muzzle of a revolver against his temple, and hear the low but stern words:

"A movement—an outcry—and you are a dead man!"

Quickly and deftly, Nat bound a handkerchief around his mouth, then forced him to rise.

A faint, moaning sound, as if of somebody in a troubled sleep, came from the opposite corner of the hut.

"His wife, no doubt," thought Nat; "in a drunken sleep; I must be off before she comes to."

Ah, Nat, if you had only known the truth!

They passed out of doors, and Nat marched the

captain of the wreckers through the streets of their little village.

Was it not a bold move?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESULT OF NAT'S BOLDNESS.

BRIAN CONWAY was in an infuriated state of mind as he marched along by Nat's side.

Chagrin at having been so easily captured, rage at his powerlessness to change the state of affairs, and fear of what would occur when once his captor had conducted him beyond the confines of the village, all struggled for mastery, and each was master in succession.

Several times he half opened his lips to give a signal, but each time it died away in his throat, for Nat, guessing his intention, more deeply impressed on Conway's mind that a cold revolver barrel was at his temple.

Then Captain Con spoke.

But Nat hushed him quickly.

"No noise," he said, sternly. "Silence—as you value your life."

And Conway cursed inwardly as they glided along in the darkness, often within a few feet of a hut which contained a ruffian or more, who, at one word, would have awakened and sprang forth ready to destroy the bold invader of the wreckers' den.

But he must be silent; to utter that word he felt would cost him his life, for Nat's words and tone and demeanor left no room for doubt as to his willingness and ability to perform what he had threatened.

As for Nat, his blood was burning with an excitement which it was difficult for him to master; and, though Conway never guessed the truth, his severity of voice and manner was assumed only by the greatest effort—his heart at the time being in a terrible flutter, for he well knew in how great a peril he had placed himself.

If but one of that motley gang of cut-throats chanced to be sleepless—chanced to meet them, as might easily be the case, all would be up.

But good fortune had so far attended his movements, and no such accident occurred.

The village was as deserted and quiet as though its inhabitants were dead.

They passed on, with no opposition offered to their progress, and at last they stood at the narrow entrance to the bowl-shaped valley, and Nat's breath came freer and easier.

"Now, we're out of danger," said Nat.

"You may be," thought Con. "But I'll be hanged if I think I am!"

They passed the entrance, and were in the rough path.

Here Nat paused in a quandary.

He had bagged his game, but what was he to do with it?

After thinking deeply for several minutes, he took Con by the shoulder, and walked him down the mountain toward the plain.

In the darkness, he was often puzzled to tell which was his way, but trusting to luck, he blundered on, until finally he was brought to a dead halt by suddenly coming upon the brow of a precipice.

With an exclamation of sorrow and disgust, he greeted this piece of ill-luck, and turning rather fiercely upon Con, he demanded:

"Why did you not tell me when you saw me going wrong?"

Dissembling as best he could, he replied—and not without some appearance of honesty in the answer:

"Going wrong? How did I know where you was taking me? How did I know but what you were leading me to some out-of-the-way place for the purpose of murdering me?"

"You prevaricate!" said Nat, sharply, seeing through the words. "Still, it is my fault, I suppose. But the question is—can you lead me back to the path?"

"No."

"You lie!"

"Very well," with a shrug of his shoulders, for he had somewhat recovered from his fear, as he began to entertain the idea that Nat's purpose was any but a bloody one; "I'm bound and can't defend myself or my reputation. Go on."

"Reputation!" cried Nat. "Bah! it needs no defending; its rottenness stinks to the very heavens."

"I'm bound," said Con, "that's all," meaning to insinuate that were his hands free, Nat should not take such liberties with his character.

"That's neither here nor there, at the present moment. You don't know the way back?"

"No."

"Then we'll stay—right here," said Nat. "Your position will be thus," and he forced him to a

sitting position on the edge of the precipice; "and mine thus," he continued, placing himself several feet to one side, but where he could see the villain's every movement, and with his cocked revolver in hand, he was ready to check any such made by his captive.

"What next?" growled Con, in surly voice.

"You'll soon learn," said Nat, sharply. "I want to ask you some questions."

"You mean—pump me. Well, you sha'n't!"

"Careful," said Nat, warningly. "I want plain, straightforward answers, and by Heaven! I mean to have them! Now, where is the girl?"

Con started in surprise, and remained silent.

"Where is the girl?" demanded Nat, sternly. "Speak!"

"What girl?" asked Con, pretending to be surprised at the query.

"You know very well what girl I mean," and Nat spoke in an exasperated tone of voice.

"Where is she?"

"I don't know who you mean! Who do you speak of?"

"Syndie Hernshaw!" thundered Nat, "and I give you one minute to answer—if you don't, as God is my judge, I'll blow your brains out!"

Brian Conway trembled in his shoes, for there was no mistaking the terrible undercurrent of meaning in Nat's words and manner.

Con hesitated.

The seconds slipped away.

"How much does he know?" thought the villain.

"Half of the time has expired!"

"Shall I tell the truth, or try first to deceive him?" ran through Con's mind.

"A quarter of a minute more," said Nat, and then arose an ominous click as he drew the hammer of the revolver to full cock.

"Time's up," and Nat took aim.

"Hold!"

"Will you speak?"

"Yes."

"'Tis well. Now, where have you concealed Syndie Hernshaw?"

"She isn't concealed at all!" replied Con. "Do you want to know the truth?"

"Of course."

"She's dead!"

"Dead!" cried Nat; "be careful how you attempt to fool with me. She is not dead! But if she is, how did she die?"

"She died the night of the fire!"

"I don't believe it."

"Then go to the Insbruck Cemetery and you'll find the proof."

Nat was grave and thoughtful.

Inwardly he thought it impossible that Syndie Hernshaw was dead, still it might be so; and though he knew how little reliance could be placed on the words of a man of Con's stamp, it sent a chill of fear that it was true, across him.

Con broke the silence.

"If it's a fair question, what are you going to do with me?"

"I don't know," was Nat's honest reply; "if you conduct yourself well, I may take enough trouble to lodge you in the county jail; but if you cut up cross with me, I'll shoot you through the head. As it is, we must camp here for the night. Come back here in the bushes and lie down, while I bind you securely."

Con was loth to be ordered around thus, but perforce must obey, and so a few minutes later he was stretched at full length on the ground with his legs bound together as well as his hands; and then Nat gagged him.

These precautions the youth took because he foresaw that he might fall asleep, though such was not his intention.

But he was weary and tired, and foresaw the possibility of such an occurrence.

He showed himself prudent, for he had not been in the bushes by his prisoner over half an hour when the drowsy feeling overcame him and he slept.

Not so, however, did Con; he was wide awake, and in his mind was revolving means of escape; he saw Nat fall asleep, waited some minutes, and then with his glistening eyes fastened on the hilt of a knife which showed in Nat's belt, he endeavored to reach it; but here again Nat's precautions balked him; Nat had tied him to a small sapling, and when at the end of his tether, Con could not reach the knife within two or three inches, a fact which caused him to fume and fret.

Like a cat watching a mouse, he kept his eyes on Nat in hopes that the lad would roll toward him in his sleep.

But in this he was doomed to disappointment,

for Nat lay as motionless as a log, until with the rising sun he opened his eyes.

Instantly he was on his feet, and after examining Con's bonds, he began a search for the mountain path, and to his surprise, discovered that he had not strayed over twenty feet from it, which fact convinced him that Con had lied when he disclaimed all knowledge of where they were.

He went back to his prisoner, and was about to unbind his legs for the purpose of starting down the mountain, when the sound of voices and footsteps put a stop to his movements.

Crawling nearer the path, he heard the conversation of the men as they passed, and from what they said learned that Con's absence had been discovered, and that for some reason his presence was so greatly desired that they were on a hunt for him.

"Hum," said Nat. "In that case we must lie low all day," and crawling back, he dragged Con a few feet further in the bushes, and then began his impatient watch for night.

CHAPTER IX.

AT DILL'S OFFICE.

JIMMY BOLTON had returned from the mountain den, and was duly initiated into a position as under book-keeper, though in reality he did no work whatever, his position being a sinecure.

Dill tried in vain to keep his private business to himself.

Bolton was one of those shrewd persons, who, prying into other persons' business, obtain a modicum of truth and then build up the balance; so Dill, finding that he could keep none of his plans from Bolton, perforce took him entirely into his confidence so far as his villainous schemes for the destruction of the I. & O. R. R. were concerned.

With the destroying of Hernshaw's house Dill was highly pleased, and he fairly gloated in satisfaction when he learned that Hernshaw, mourning his daughter as dead, had buried the unrecognizable remains as hers.

But when the plot of destroying the train by letting it through the bridge became known as a failure, he was moved into cursing it at a round rate, for he had counted on this as a finishing stroke, the *coup d'état* that should drive his rival from the field.

Having failed in this he set his wits to work to strike another blow, and one which should accomplish the result he was aiming at.

Bolton and he were in his private office, and the latter was discussing the possible results of a loosened rail.

"A very good plan," said Bolton, "but one that is too common; it shows the hand of an enemy too plainly; what you want is to strike a quiet, underhand stroke, like the burning of Hernshaw's house."

"Pshaw! I'm not of your opinion. Let the boys barricade across the track as they used to, and when the train tumbles let 'em rush in and cut what throats they want to. It pleases them best and gives 'em a chance to make a stake out of it."

"It's a risky business, though. They tried that a couple of times and finally only escaped with their lives when Hernshaw organized for defense."

"Yes; but they don't carry anyone on board now but passengers."

"Well," with a shrug of his shoulders, "you're the doctor—there's a knock."

"Go to the door," said Dill.

Bolton did as directed, and opened the door to the county sheriff, whom he did not know, but who was recognized instantly by Dill, who at once invited him to enter.

"Well, sir," said Dill, in a business, matter-of-fact way, "what can I do for you?"

The sheriff's reply was a queer grimace, and a glance at Bolton, as much as to demand his absence.

"Oh, you needn't mind me; I'm O. K., ain't I, cap?"

"Yes," said Dill, when appealed to thus directly. "Go ahead, sheriff. What's in the wind?"

"Nothing particular," he said, half reluctantly, for he did not like the idea of Bolton's presence. "I only came to tell you that the people up in Insbruck are organizing themselves into a vigilance committee, and the first time another train is wrecked they're going to take the field."

"Ah!" said Dill; "that's bad."

"Just what I told you," put in Bolton. "Don't be too open about it, but strike secretly and mysteriously."

The sheriff made no further remark except to bid them good-day, and to promise to come

again, if he heard anything that would be of interest to Dill.

"Strike secretly and mysteriously," repeated Bolton; "that's my idea."

"Perhaps you can suggest a way to strike 'secretly and mysteriously?'" said Dill, in a sneering tone.

"I can," said Bolton, suddenly brightening up. "I've got an idea how to do the thing."

"What is it?"

"I'll tell you."

And then Bolton unfolded a plot which was fiendish enough in detail to satisfy even the hellish mind of Caleb Dill, who, when his companion had finished, exclaimed:

"I'll see about the thing at once. Jimmy, you're a brick to think of it."

And, determined to lose no time, he left the office at once.

He had been gone but a short while, when two persons entered.

They were Dick Klinck and Rand McCormick, and, strange to say, they seemed on the most familiar footing.

It came about in this way:

On the night when Rand took that desperate leap, it will be remembered that he dived into the bushes to avoid being seen by the conductor and brakeman.

He was pretty well used up from his long run and the weakening due to the excitement and horror of his late situation, when death's jaws were open and were momentarily expected to close upon him.

When once out of sight, he flung himself down for a rest, and remained where he threw himself all that night and nearly all the next day, for it was late in the afternoon when he struck out across the plain toward the mountain.

He reached the foot-hills just as the sun was sinking in the horizon. He was determined to visit the mountain den once more.

He skirted the valley in hopes of seeing something of Nat Norwood in the enclosure below, but, of course, in this he was disappointed.

But had he only known it, Nat Norwood, alive and well, was even doing as he was—peering down on the home of the outlaws from a place of concealment.

Klinck found Captain Con in his hut, in one corner of which was Syndie Hernshaw, cowering in fear of such another cruel blow as had raised a fearful lump on her cheek, which was turned black and blue.

Klinck delivered the messages intrusted to him by Dill, and then arose to go, stating that he was going to return to Greenburgh the next afternoon.

Leaving Con's, he was passing through the village towards his own hut, when he encountered a rum-bloated creature, whom he familiarly saluted with:

"Halloo, old gal, how goes it?"

"Middlin'," was the reply. "Goin' to stay long?"

"Not very."

"I'm sorry," she said.

"You needn't be. If I was here long, Bill would murder you. By the way, how does Bill come on?"

"Tor'able," she answered.

This Bill referred to was the man to whom this degraded creature stood in the relation of a wife.

We said wife.

Heaven save the mark!

She scarce knew what the word meant, and had more than once given Bill reason to think that she was a wife to Klinck as much as to himself.

Passionate, hot-headed, Bill had more than once threatened Klinck's life, after trying vainly to reform his wife through beating her.

"I'll see you to-night," said Klinck.

"All right," said the woman, and they separated.

They did meet that night, but there was an unseen third party there, Bill, the outraged husband, and when they were finally gone, he glided from his place of concealment, and with the foulest oaths swore to kill Klinck.

The next afternoon, while the gang were in the beginning of a general debauch, Klinck passed out of the valley and began descending the mountain.

Rand McCormick, driven by hunger, had descended the mountain in quest of food more than an hour before.

Having succeeded in shooting a rabbit, he was preparing to cook it in a secluded nook he had discovered, when he heard the tramp of feet, and then saw a man pass by.

It was Bill; in his hand he carried a cocked re-

volver, and there was murder in his bloodshot eyes.

Rand dropped his rabbit, and followed.

Shortly after he heard a shot just ahead of him, then another, and curses loud and deep.

Hurrying forward, he saw Klinck and Bill, within a few feet of each other, popping away like mad, at each shot advancing closer; instantly Rand's revolver was out, and cocked, and with the desire for vengeance boiling within him, he drew a bead on Klinck just as Bill, dropping his revolver, pulled out his knife, and sprang upon Klinck.

Crack!

A wild cry—a groan—and Bill, instead of Rand's intended victim—fell a bleeding corpse.

But for that shot it would have been all day with Klinck, who, as his antagonist fell, glanced quickly toward whence the shot came, and seeing Rand, exclaimed:

"Well done, young fellow; much obliged," and stepping toward him, he added: "give us your hand."

Had he known the truth, he would hardly have been so friendly.

Rand's fingers itched to stretch him out beside Bill; but the thought struck him:

"Here is a chance to get in with somebody who can be of use to me," and staying his desire for revenge, he accepted the proffered hand.

"Who are you?" asked Klinck.

At once Rand invented a cock and bull story of having just escaped from Joliet prison, and of being then on the look-out for any gang of rascals to connect himself with.

Klinck swallowed the bait at once, and claiming his connection with the wreckers, agreed to put Rand through, an offer speedily accepted by the lad, who to his joy saw that he was not recognized.

"I'm going to Greenburgh," said Klinck; "you'd better go there with me, first."

"Agreed," said Rand, and thus we see them entering the private office of Caleb Dill together.

"Halloo!" said Bolton; "who've you got there?"

"A youngster who wants to join our crowd of good fellows."

"What's his creed?"

"A short life but a merry one," put in Rand.

"Ay—ay, you'll do," said Bolton, deceived by his words and swaggering air. "Where did you graduate?"

"At Joliet."

"Good place," said Bolton, grimly. "If that's the case I'll swear by you."

"Where's Dill?" asked Klinck.

"Be back shortly. Sit down."

Dill soon came in, and there was a smile of satisfaction on his face, and to Bolton he remarked:

"All correct. Ah! Klinck, you're just in time; you're the very man I want. Who's that?" glancing suspiciously at Rand.

This was explained to Dill's satisfaction, who then sat down and wrote a letter of instructions to Con.

This he handed to Klinck with the remark:

"If that don't settle him, nothing will. If he fights against fate any longer, I'll shoot myself," not meaning however to do any such thing.

They reached the den just after daylight, and Con's hut being empty, search was made for him in every direction.

CHAPTER X.

OVER THE CLIFF.

EXACTLY what to do puzzled Nat very much, and in the interim of deciding he remained where he was, in the bushes at the edge of the cliff.

Lying here, he could hear the parties of men hunting for Con up and down every now and then.

The gang were in a quandary, to a man, to account for Con's absence.

They went to the little clearing where Squiggs and Ruggles had acted in some measure as an outpost, and here found the bodies of three men killed by Rand; and on taking a short cut up the mountain they stumbled upon the dead body of Bill, the manner of whose death Klinck kept to himself for private reasons.

But Con could not be found, and Klinck and the outlaws waited with all impatience for him to put in an appearance, and not the least interested of all was Rand, who up to this time had not ventured one question concerning the object nearest his heart for fear of awaking suspicion; another reason that made him await Con's ap-

pearance with interest was because he felt assured that in the letter for him in Klinck's care was outlined some hellish plot, which he longed to know, so as to take measures to defeat it.

He was more than once upon the point of questioning Klinck concerning Nat, of advising him to open the letter, when a feeling of prudence held him back, and inwardly fretting, he waited for the denouement.

The hours dragged by as slowly to him as they did to Nat, who felt how great was the danger by which he was surrounded.

Afternoon came, the sun began to decline, and still Con did not appear.

Then the sky began to cloud up, and all knew that a storm was near at hand.

It was beginning to grow dark when Klinck determined to descend the mountain in charge of a searching party, and they started as soon almost as the design was formed.

Nat's heart meanwhile had been growing lighter; in the coming darkness—in the storm—he saw a chance of escape with his captive, and began to feel comparatively safe.

This, perhaps, caused him to relax his watch over Con, a fact which did not escape the outlaw's notice, and he took advantage of it in this way:

But a few feet away was a loose stone of perhaps half a dozen pounds weight; towards this he wriggled himself until it was just before his feet; this much accomplished, he lay quietly and waited the turn of affairs.

Nat heard the coming of Klinck as well as Con, and pricked up his ears—though he had no fears of being discovered, as it was already dark—very dark, in truth.

Now was Con's chance!

When they were opposite, Con braced himself, and gave the rock a shove which sent it rolling over and over, until, reaching the edge of the cliff, it tottered and fell with a crash to the bottom far below.

"Halt!" cried Klinck, as he heard the stone crashing down; and then with head bent, he listened.

In the excitement of the moment, Nat forgot his caution, and jumped to his feet, exclaiming:

"Hal you treacherous dog!" thus revealing his whereabouts.

"Boys," cried Klinck, "there's been foul play! follow me," and he dashed from the path into the bushes.

Nat's thoughts were like lightning flashes, and quicker than we can tell it, he had whipped out his knife, cut the bonds on Con's ankles, and dragged him to his feet.

"Now," said he, sternly, taking him by the shoulder, "the first noise, and I'll murder you! Come," and he began retreating along the edge of the cliff.

A rush of feet, a crashing through the bushes, and then a shout:

"Ah—ha! boys, there they are. Shoot the dog!"

"Hold!" cried Nat, who saw that further concealment was out of the question. "I've got here Brian Conway, and as sure as the first one of you fires a shot, I'll put a bullet through his brain!"

They halted, and their revolvers dropped, while every tongue roundly cursed the daring fellow.

"Now," said Nat, "we'll make the best use of our time," still holding fast of Con, he continued his retreat.

Klinck and his men followed, fuming with rage, kept at bay by a single hand, unable to do a thing.

Nat began to exult at heart, when the face of affairs was suddenly changed by Con, who had grown wild with desperation.

He was on the inside; Nat was nearest the cliff; pretending to stumble, he threw his whole weight against the lad, forcing him to the verge of the precipice.

Nat lost his balance; a quick wrench, and Con was loose.

"Dog!" cried the lad, and pointing his revolver at Con, he fired; then uttered a groan of anguish as he lost his equilibrium completely, and—fell!

Guessing the truth, Klinck rushed up, unbound Con's arms, and removed the gag.

"Where is he?" asked Klinck.

"He fell," was all Con's swollen jaws would let him utter.

They looked over the precipice, but it was so dark that they could see nothing, and satisfied that Nat must have been dashed to pieces on the rocks below, they returned to the den, where Klinck delivered his letter.

Con at once selected six men to accompany him on horseback.

To this party was added Klinck and Rand, the latter puzzling his brain for a possible solution of the adventure then on hand.

They rode hard and fast straight towards Insbruck, and finally halted when within twenty miles of the place, right alongside of the railroad track; Con and Klinck disappeared into some bushes, but speedily returned with a small box which they handled, Rand thought, very gingerly.

They opened it carefully, and Rand saw them take out about half a dozen long, ovoid shaped objects, which they proceeded to fasten to the rails.

All at once the horrible truth flashed upon him.

The dark objects were torpedoes!

In the agony of the discovery, the sweat broke out from every pore in his body, for the night express was almost due, and in fancy he already heard the rending explosion, the wrecked train, the burning cars, the shrieks of the maimed and dying victims.

CHAPTER XI.

NAT TO THE RESCUE.

POOR Rand M'Cormick!

In imagination, he saw the whole dread catastrophe, saw the train wrecked, engineer killed, passengers wounded and dying.

This drifted before him like a picture, and he groaned aloud:

"What is the matter with you?"

It was Klinck who asked the question.

"Nothing," replied Rand. "A pain—that's all," he added.

Klinck turned away from him, and said:

"Well, cap, got it all right?"

"Yes."

"What next?"

"Only to get away from here."

"Ain't we a-goin' to have a chance to make a spec out of this?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because we want the destruction of this train to be as mysterious as possible; we don't want it known that we had any hand in it."

"I don't like this," grumbled one man. "We used to do things openly, and I don't see why we can't yet. We can whip any company of men they can send into the mountains. I like good rough-and-tumble fighting, something exciting. But this sneaking way I don't like."

"Nor I," said another.

"Shut up, both of you!" commanded Con. "I don't want to hear another word. You're here to do as I say, and you shall, or—" and he stopped, but shook his head in a threatening manner.

Con went upon the track and examined the torpedoes once more, then returning, he mounted his horse, saying:

"Come, boys, we must be miles away from here when that explosion takes place."

They all mounted, Rand among the rest.

Poor Rand!

His mind was in a tumult.

What should he do?

His blood turned cold when he thought of calmly leaving the train to its fate; yet what could he do prevent it?

He dared not leave the company he was in, for they would suspect him; besides, leaving them now would spoil his chances of hearing what had become of Nat Norwood, the Young Engineer.

He resolved to stay.

Then he thought of the horrible scene about to be enacted.

He determined to desert the party and save the train.

Gradually slowing the pace of his horse, he was soon four or five feet in the rear.

His heart began to beat loud and fast with hopes of success.

In a few minutes he would be far enough behind to turn and fly.

"Halt!"

In that word were Rand's plans destroyed, his hopes crushed.

They all came to a standstill at the brow of a long roll of the land.

"Here we'll wait to see what happens," said Con, when they had obeyed his order. "But—Klinck, where's that young friend of yours—that young Gipsy?"

Rand heard the alarmed tone in which the words were spoken, knew that he could not hope to escape unnoticed, knew that all hope of being

able to give the warning was useless, and so advanced the few steps that separated them.

"Ah, there you are!" said Con; "what was you staying behind for?"

Ready-witted, Rand replied:

"My horse, I thought, went a little lame, and I dismounted to see if he had possibly picked up a stone."

"Ah!" said Con, in a tone free from suspicion again. "Ugh!"

This latter exclamation was caused by a cold gust of wind, and then the storm that had been brooding over them since sunset, burst in all its wildness.

The wind blew fiercely, and the rain fairly poured.

But the wretches were used to all sorts of

The cliff, at this point, was all seamed and scarred. These clefts in the rock had gradually gathered a soil from the particles deposited by the atmosphere, and in this soil, thus furnished, stunted bushes grew.

When Nat fell, he of course clutched about him, in the endeavor to find some supporting hold.

None could he find as he went over the cliff, and his lips were all pursed up for his death wail, when his career was shortened by striking, first the bushes, and then the ledge or shelf.

Instantly, he saw what was to be done, and so without moving a muscle, he laid perfectly still. He heard them as they peered over the cliff.

Would they see him?

"Yes."

"And no other message?"

"No."

"Did he say anything about the——"

And the rest was lost to Nat's ears; but his imagination finished the sentence: "girl, Syndie Hernshaw."

So he finished it, and muttered: "I'm sure she lives still and that she is kept a prisoner here! Though if she is, why should he have told me that she was dead and buried? I'll enter the den while its master is gone, and find out the truth if it costs a leg."

They had passed.

He stepped into the road and began ascending it; half the distance to the crest had been accomplished when, at his very feet, Nat saw some-



Rand was caught about the waist, lifted up and hurled downward, to be ground to pieces beneath the wheels of the rushing train.

weather, and with only a curse or two and a shrinking closer in their clothes, they bore it without saying a word, waiting for the train, now nearly due, to come.

They were nearly a mile from the place where the torpedoes were, but near enough, however, to see if their vile plans succeeded.

And, waiting thus, minute after minute stole by.

These torpedoes, as we have called them, were not so in fact, but were little tubes of dynamite and nitro-glycerine. Of a large quantity used in building the G. & O. R., a few were left in the cellar attached to the station.

Dill knew of their presence, and had spoken of them to Bolton as the means of breaking up a rock which they wished to get out of the way.

Bolton thought of these, and it was concerning them he whispered to Dill, when Klinck and Rand were in Greenburgh.

Selecting a number of them, Dill had put them in a box, and sent them by a trusty man to the spot where they were found by Con.

Having explained this to the reader, we must now return and see what became of Nat Norwood.

He did not fall, as Con supposed, to the bottom of the cliff, and when the ruffians were looking over the cliff he could almost have struck them in the face with the flat of his hand, had he so wished.

It so chanced that within seven or eight feet of the top edge of the cliff was a slight, shelf-like projection.

His heart bounded in his breast, and he prayed God not.

But they did not discover him, for they could not see two feet in the dense darkness occasioned by the storm settling over them.

After they had gone, Nat arose to his feet, but took no steps toward leaving the ledge for some minutes, not knowing but that someone might have been left behind.

Hearing no noise as the minutes passed, he determined to investigate his position.

By lifting up his hands, he found he could touch the top of the cliff.

This discovery overjoyed him, as it made his escape an easy matter.

He found a place where the roughness of the face of the cliff offered him a foothold.

Then catching hold above, he was less than a minute in placing himself in safety.

Now that he was free, what was to be done?

He hardly knew what to do, but in his quandary he walked along toward the road which the daylight had disclosed, and whose nearness Con, when a prisoner, had denied any knowledge of.

He had just reached the edge of the road, when he heard the tramp of horses' feet.

"What's up?" he thought. "I'll find out if I can," and he concealed himself in some bushes.

A few minutes later he saw a party of horsemen pass, and one voice which he recognized was that of Con.

"Where can they be going?" he thought.

"They're up to some deviltry, sure."

He listened on; Con was talking to Klinck.

"The letter was all he gave you?"

thing that in the darkness appeared very white.

He stooped and took up the article; it was paper, writing paper, and folded in letter form.

Like lightning there flashed through his mind the questions and replies of Con and Klinck; and then he clutched the letter eagerly.

Had he found a prize?

He determined to learn, and diving into the brush, he selected a spot where the glare of a fire would be shielded from the road by intervening rocks.

Rapidly he gathered a few handfuls of dry twigs, and then with a match he lighted them.

The fire was faint and small, but crouched on his elbows and knees, with the light shining upon the paper, he read what it contained, and as he read, his face grew pale with consternation.

It was Dill's letter to Con, which the latter had lost, and Nat read in all their minute details the devilish instructions for the destroying of the train.

He knew the spot and all where it was to take place.

Reading to the end, he jumped to his feet, trampled the fire out, and then stood confounded, irresolute.

"God help me decide what to do," he murmured, in a sorrowful voice.

His mind drew the same imaginative picture as had that of Rand, and put him in equally as great distress.

Weakened and unnerved by the news, he staggered back toward the roadway.

Here he paused.

He believed Syndie to be an inmate of the wreckers' nest; he had sworn to himself to penetrate it that very night—but humanity demanded his presence elsewhere.

He heard the tramp of a horse's feet approaching; it decided him what to do.

The horseman drew near: Nat took aim at him, and with a murmured: "God forgive me!" shot him through the head, and as the rider fell he secured his steed.

He bounded on the back of the animal, turned his head down the mountain, and dashed off to the rescue.

CHAPTER XII.

SYNDIE.

LET us here take a rapid glance at the progress of affairs with Syndie Hernshaw.

As has been incidentally stated before, she was taken to Greenburgh on the night of the abduction, and taken away from there on a train starting before daylight.

She could do nothing to help herself, as she was gagged, and a veil concealing her features hid this fact from any person who chanced to see her.

Had anybody asked Con why he took so much trouble to convey the girl in safety to the nest in the mountains, he would have been puzzled to answer.

It was from no scruples of conscience against murdering her, for this he could have done as easily as he could eat his breakfast.

He did not exactly love the girl, yet would have married her at once should she have expressed any sign of being willing to accept such a position.

But one thing he did—he respected her—and though she was with him so much, he never used the first insulting word or look toward her, a fact to his credit, villain—deeply-dyed—though he was.

They left the train and reached the mountain without incident, and at once Syndie was conveyed to Con's hut and delivered into the charge of a wretched looking hag called Bet, who took charge of Con's hut and filled the combined position of servant and mistress.

"Here, Bet, is a boarder for you," said Con, as he entered with Syndie.

The hag looked up at the sound of the voice, but when her gaze lighted on the face of the fair young girl, her eyes flashed and her brow darkened so visibly, that Syndie shrank back in fear.

"Ha-ha-ha!" roared Con. "Here, Bet, none of your frightening the gal, but just be good to her and take care of her the best you know how. Treat her kindly, but keep your eyes on her so't she don't escape;" and then turning to Syndie, he continued: "This is to be your home for the present. If you behave yourself it will be easy for you, but the first attempt at escape we will resort to harsh measures. Understand?"

"Yes," murmured the frightened girl. "But, sir, pray what are you going to do with me?" she asked, for the first time putting the question that had been trembling on her tongue from the first minute the gag had been removed from her mouth.

"I don't know yet," was Con's reply. "I'll decide before long, so make yourself as easy as you can, and don't worry," and then he departed to look after some affairs that needed his attention.

Bet's reception was not the most hearty, for she kind of regarded Syndie, not as a captive, but as an intruder on her domain, and no sooner had Con's back vanished from sight, than she sprang forward, and seizing the prisoner roughly by the shoulder, demanded:

"Did you come here of your own free will?"

"Come here of my own free will!" echoed Syndie, with a shudder; then added, in fervent tones: "God in Heaven, no—no!"

"Then you're not here from love of the captain?"

"No!"

"That's a blessing for you," said Bet, grimly.

"What'd they fetch you here for?"

"I don't know."

"What's your name?"

"Syndie Hernshaw."

"Oh!" said Bet, as she guessed that Syndie was the daughter of the railroad president. "That alters the case."

"How so?" said Syndie, quickly.

"No matter," was the reply.

The hut was a miserable affair, though better than any of the rest!

It had but one room, which was kitchen, dining-room, parlor, and bedroom all in one.

Syndie was disgusted with the idea of passing the night here, particularly so when she learned that Con also occupied it as his sleeping quarters.

She begged of him to partition off a part of the room for her use, which after some grumbling he did, by suspending a blanket from the ceiling, so as to cut off one corner of the room.

And here Syndie lived, accepting what came without resistance, being inert and hopeless.

A few days after her arrival, Con broached the subject of marriage to her during an absence of Bet's.

Syndie, of course, indignantly refused to join her fair and spotless fame with that of a black-hearted and red-handed outlaw.

So plainly did she speak her mind that Con was deeply incensed, and he threatened her with everything bad, but Syndie seemed to grow stronger beneath his cruelties, and flung his words back into his teeth.

"I shall only ask you once more," said Con, with a cruel smile; "and beware how you answer! will you marry?"

Before he could finish the sentence, or Syndie form a reply, the door opened and Bet entered; her darkened brow left no doubt that she had overheard Con's last words, but she said nothing, and Con, made uneasy by her threatening, tiger-like aspect, made some excuse, and left the two women together.

"So," cried the insanely-jealous woman, "you want to rob me of Con, do you? Curses on your doll-baby face," and springing upon Syndie, she battered and bruised her until the poor girl lay half stunned on the floor.

"Get up!" said Bet, harshly: "get up, do you hear? And mind you, if you ever say a word to Con of this, I'll murder you," and she showed the terrified girl a hideous knife whose handle was stained a dull red, not from paint, but from human blood.

From this time on Syndie's life was a hell on earth.

Con seemed afraid of Bet, and with good reason, for he had ascended to the leadership of the gang through a fancy for him which led into plunging that same knife into the heart of the former captain, who had been her husband.

But one thing restrained Bet from killing Syndie, and that was that her brother had been among those killed by Hernshaw's employees while he was engaged in that terrible scene where Nat and the two express messengers were pinned up in the burning car; in Syndie she saw the means of revenging her brother's death, and she was as cruel to her as a fiend could have been.

On the night of Nat's "bold move," she had made herself drunk with the rest; as a precaution against any attempt at escape on Syndie's part, and as a partial gratification of her devilishness, she bound and gagged the girl; and the moans that Nat heard, were not those of a person in a drunken sleep, but of Syndie, for whom he was searching, yet whose nearness he never suspected.

Bet was in the hut at the time, in a sleep of drunken torpor, and when she finally woke and found Con gone, she was mad.

Syndie's moaning attracted her attention, and she then perceived the gag.

"Oh," she said, "I kept you bound and gagged all night, did I? You must excuse me, my lady, (mockingly), for I was so drunk I forgot it."

As she released the girl, she said:

"Didn't sleep much, eh?"

"No," moaned Syndie, who could scarcely move her jaws, so stiff were they.

"When did Con go out?"

"I don't know," was the reply, and then she set to chafing her numbed limbs.

The day passed. Con came not, and when there arose suspicions of foul play, Bet pounced upon Syndie, and demanded what she knew of the affair.

The poor girl could say nothing to oppose Bet's wrath, and the enraged hag began beating her so unmercifully, that Syndie ran screaming from the hut, with the blood streaming from her nose, Bet after her.

Syndie ran into a hut for refuge, and its only inmate, as he saw her, muttered curses loud and deep, and then, as Bet came into view, whispered into the girl's ear:

"Go back and be quiet. I'll try to set you free. Look for me to night."

Ere Syndie could reply, she was seized by the hair and dragged back to the hut of the she-devil, and none that saw dared interfere, so terrible was Bet's reputation.

All day long Bet harassed the poor girl; but when Con came home after his rescue, her mood changed, and when he had gone, she plied her-

self with whiskey, and soon was stretched out like a log.

And Syndie? She waited until all sounds of stirring had ceased, waited until she thought all in the village were asleep, and then she stole forth into the stormy night to try to escape.

CHAPTER XIII.

GAME TO THE DEATH.

NAT NORWOOD knew how pressing was the mission he had entered on, and knew that if he would reach the spot selected for the hellish deed before the train passed, he must make good time.

Ere mounting he had caught up a switch which fell from the hand of the man he had shot, and with this he struck the animal he bestrode frequent and severe blows across the flanks.

As Fate had decreed, the animal which had fallen to his lot for this ever-to-be-remembered ride, was a good one, both in speed and in bottom.

Nat urged him to his best.

A madman would scarcely have sent a horse flying down such a road, but Nat well knew it was either make or break, and his set teeth and tightly-closed lips expressed his determination to make it the former if it was in human power so to do.

He got down the mountain in safety, and struck the prairie.

Halting just enough to get his bearing, he struck his steed sharply with the whip, and sent him scouring over the level ground for all he was worth.

On he went like the wind that was blowing fiercely.

On he went, not able to see ten feet ahead.

On he went, caring not for the dangers that might lie in his way.

Big drops of rain began to fall, and then heaven's flood gates seemed to open, but he never slackened his pace one bit, and rather hit again and again his already nearly wing-footed steed.

On—on—on—and then suddenly from the darkness loomed up the figure of a single horseman, who, in stentorian tones, cried:

"Halt!"

Nat heeded not the command, but delivered his steed a cruel cut across the head and eyes.

"Halt, d— you!" rang out above the tumult of the storm.

On went Nat, paying no more attention than if it had been the cry of a frog or a bird.

Then he heard the horseman halloo wildly at his steed, and knew that he was being pursued.

"Faster," he cried, "faster," and bent down so that he would lessen the force of the wind against him.

Crack!

A bullet whizzed by Nat's ear.

He only bent lower, and urged his straining steed to new exertions.

Crack—crack!

"Thank God!" cried Nat, "no harm done yet. On, my brave boy, faster—faster!"

But the pursuer's steed was freshest, and Nat knew that he was being gained on, for the rider's voice sounded nearer and nearer.

Crack!

A neigh of Nat's steed, a stagger; and the lad knew that the horse had been struck.

He made as if to stop, but rendered cruel by the desperation of the situation, Nat gathered all his strength, and laid cut after cut on his poor steed's withers.

With a cry of pain the steed bounded forward at greater speed than ever for a few minutes, and then Nat saw that his pace was lessening.

He plied the whip, but all to no purpose; his steed was used up by the hard work and the unlucky bullet.

Crack!

The bullets passed between Nat's elbow and body, and severed one of the reins; no longer could he control his steed—the game was up.

"Up? No! Not yet!"

The horse stopped.

"Ha-ha-ha!" came the ringing of a hoarse voice. "Winged you, have I? Just stay where you are if you don't want me to make crow-bait of you," and at a swinging gait the pursuer bore down upon the scene.

Nat slipped to the ground, and covering himself behind the body of his tottering steed, he drew and cocked his revolver.

But just as the horseman came up, Nat's cover was removed, for the horse fell.

"I've got my eye on you," shouted the horseman; "don't stir a finger or I'll shoot," and Nat

heard the click of the hammer as it was drawn back. "Who are you, anyhow?"

Nat started, for the voice, before familiar, he now recognized as that of Jimmy Bolton.

"I'll tell you who I am!" cried the lad, and as he sprang forward, and dragged Bolton from the saddle, he yelled: "I'm Nat Norwood!"

Crack! Bolton had fired as Nat threw him to the earth, and then, as Nat laughed scornfully, he shouted: "D—the luck!" and cocked his revolver again.

Nat hesitated only a minute, then he placed his revolver at Bolton's head, fired, leaped into the saddle, and was away like the wind.

Two miles away or less lay the point he was striving to reach, and between them was the bloodthirsty Con and his companions.

On—on Natsped, never swerving to right or left. A mile was gone over: in a few minutes he would be at the top of a slope, and then the goal was not far distant.

"What's that?"

It was Klinck who spoke, and immediately all listened; they clearly heard the fall of a horse's feet.

"Who can it be?" cried Con. "Spread out, boys, and stop him; he must give an account of himself."

Nat was on the *qui vive*.

He knew that soon he must meet those who had come to carry out the devilish instructions of Dill's letter.

He reached the summit of the long land-roll, gathered his reins a little to dash down the gentle descent, when—

"Halt!" broke on his ears.

He looked up, saw dimly the figures before him.

The time of trial had come.

A quick, sharp cut, his horse bounded forward—crack—crack! another cut—a shout—a horseman came close, reached out for his bridle.

The time to act had come.

Up came his revolver—crack—a howl of agony; the daring fellow dropped from his saddle.

"Fire!" yelled Con.

"Get up!" shrieked Nat, and cut the horse sharply.

Crack—crack—crack!

He felt a sharp, stinging pain in his side, but heedless of that, he only cared for the dark figure on horseback before him.

He measured the distance, a few long bounds: he raised his horse to the leap, and Dick Klinck was carried from his saddle to the ground by the horse's feet, while brave Nat, clear of his enemies, plied his whip, and disappeared in the darkness.

"After him!" yelled Con, and away they swept in pursuit.

Meanwhile, in the distance was heard the shriek of the locomotive whistle, and presently they heard the rumble of the coming train.

Nat reeled in his saddle, and cried:

"Good God, shall I fail now?"

He clenched his hand over the wound from which the blood was spurting, and sent his steed along at a maddening pace.

Each instant Nat was growing weaker, and it filled his soul with sorrow, for he feared he could not keep up long enough.

The outlaws gave up the chase when they saw the headlight come in sight, and Nat had it all to himself.

On—on—on!

He faltered, he shook in his saddle, but he clung on; he reached the track, stood his steed across it; he felt himself growing weak, everything began to grow hazy, he fell to the ground; the horse took a step off the track.

"No—no!" shrieked Nat, who felt the world slipping away from him.

"You must be the warning!" and cocking his revolver, he fired and the horse fell.

"They can't help seeing his body and stop," murmured Nat, and crawling outside the track he sank prone on the ground.

Nearer and nearer came the locomotive; the engineer discovered the obstruction and whistled down brakes.

But the animal was not dead, and roused by the thunders of the train and the glaring light, he gave a convulsive movement and threw himself off the track.

The engineer whistled "brakes off!"

It struck Nat's fleeting senses, and raising on one elbow, he waved the other hand wildly and yelled:

"No—no—no! Stop—stop!" and sank back in a swoon.

CHAPTER XIV.

NAT'S WOUND.

THAT was a moment of agony to Nat when he saw the horse struggle off the track, for he feared the engineer now would not stop.

Loss of blood had made him very weak, and he hardly felt able to raise his head, yet he struggled to a half sitting position, and supported by one elbow, he waved his free hand above his head, and cried:

"No—no—stop—come no further!" and then wailed, as, strength exhausted, he fell backward: "Oh, God! do they fail to understand?"

The engineer had given the signal to down brakes when he saw the horse across the track.

He had heard the pistol shot a minute before, and it put him on the alert for danger.

The horse might have thrown the train from the track, so he whistled "down brakes," but when the track was cleared of the horse, he wanted to rush right through the crowd which he had supposed had put the horse on the track to stop him.

Then he espied that figure outside the track that wildly waved its hand, and then he fancied he heard:

"Stop—go no further!"

A new light broke in upon his understanding; he was being stopped to prevent his running into danger.

The world was drifting away from Nat, still there penetrated to his understanding the shrieks of the whistle, and then he heard the jolting and jerking, knew that the train was at a standstill, and then with a: "Thank God!" on his lips, he fainted away.

In less than a minute from the time the halt was made, the conductor was at the cab steps inquiring what had happened.

"I hardly know myself," said the engineer, and then in a few words he told of the horse, its lying across the track, its struggling away, of the figure that brandished its hand as a signal to stop.

"Where did you see the person?" asked the conductor.

"He must now be just about opposite the engine," was the reply. "Hey! halloo, there! I say—halloo!" he cried aloud.

But no reply came.

The conductor swung his lamp around his head, and as its rays extended their horizon, he imagined he saw extended on the ground the figure of a man.

Drawing his revolver as a precautionary measure, and bidding two brakemen to do the same thing, the trio advanced until they stood beside the still, lifeless-looking form of Nat.

The conductor swung his lantern close to Nat's face and body, and thus discovered the fact that he had fainted from the effects of a wound, his clothing being dyed crimson with the blood that had flowed freely.

"Poor fellow!" said the conductor, "he evidently was wounded while endeavoring to save us. There must be some frightful danger ahead. Pick him up, boys: carefully, there; now carry him on board."

There happened to be a good physician on board, and into his hands the conductor committed Nat, and then he called together the coolest heads in the train for a consultation as to whether they should go ahead.

When they heard the whole story of how the train was stopped, it was held advisable not to proceed until the nature of the danger which threatened them was known.

The engineer and fireman acquiesced in this, but nevertheless, the former felt more than half inclined to go ahead.

"Bob," to the fireman, "go ahead with the lantern, and examine the track closely, and let me know if you see anything like a loose rail."

The fireman did as requested, and having reported the track safe for a hundred feet, the engineer slowly advanced that far; the action calling to the front, when the train came to a halt again, the conductor, several brakemen, and a number of passengers.

"Why did you start up?" demanded the conductor.

"Bob's ahead," was the reply. "He says the track is safe, and I went as far as he had examined it."

The conductor was just framing a reply when they all saw Bob bend over the track and pick something up.

They saw him hold it close to the light to examine it, then heard a low cry of terror, and saw his palsied arm try to fling away the thing.

All this was to them a mystery.

But it was destined not to be so long, for Bob's terror overcame his self-possession, and instead of quietly laying down the torpedo and backing away from the dangerous spot, he attempted to throw it far from him; fear unnerved him, his muscles were relaxed, and when he let go it fell to his very feet—struck the rail—there came a report like thunder—a single death-cry—a rush of wind that prostrated the little crowd, and nearly lifted the engine from the track—and the fireman, torn into a thousand pieces, was flying through the air, while dirt and ties were scattered in all directions.

Dazed and stunned, the party of men arose to their feet and gazed toward the spot where such havoc had been made, gazed and trembled as they thought what might have been the case but for the timely warning they had received.

The danger was over now, they thought, so advancing, they saw for the first time the full extent of the destruction caused by the torpedo; a hole had been scooped out in the ground at least ten feet square and as many deep.

The ties had been splintered, and broken and ripped clear of the rails, and were bent and twisted so that they looked like huge snakes.

But as they were looking around they discovered several small, dark objects attached to the rails, and upon the sight at once beat a hasty retreat, not caring to share the awful fate suffered by the fireman.

Another consultation was held. They could not go forward anyhow, so it was thought best to return to Insbruck, and have a construction train sent out.

This plan was communicated to the engineer, who at once reversed his engine and ran back to Insbruck, where they arrived, much to the surprise of the depot master, who at once sent to awaken Mr. Hernshaw.

During all this time the physician had been attending to Nat, but beyond stanching the flow of blood, had been able to do but little for him, owing to the lack of his case of medicines and instruments.

Arrived at Insbruck, they carried him up stairs to a small room, and here the physician probed the hole in Nat's side, located the ball, and then cut it out, after which he washed and dressed the wound, and was engaged in restoring Nat to consciousness when Mr. Hernshaw entered.

"Who is this person?" he asked. "Do you know him?"

"No," replied the physician. "His face is a good one, but he is in disguise," the last few words uttered in a grave tone, for the physician was one of those who always associate concealment or disguise with guilt, from not taking the time to reflect that on occasions the purest righteousness needs to be cloaked.

"In disguise?" repeated Mr. Hernshaw.

"Yes."

"How—what is his disguise?"

"This."

The physician pulled off the wig, and Hernshaw saw and recognized—Nat Norwood.

"Good God!" he ejaculated. "Is it possible? Nat—Nat—Nat!"

He bent down, and called the name in the lad's ear.

It seemed to bring back life, for he opened his eyes, looked up, met the gaze of Mr. Hernshaw, his face brightened, and he weakly said:

"Mr. Hernshaw."

"Ay—ay—my boy!" was the hearty reply, "and glad to see you did not get murdered by those fiends of the mountains. You saved the train, they tell me. How was it done?"

And here we will leave Nat relating to Mr. Hernshaw what the reader already knows.

CHAPTER XV.

SYNDIE'S ESCAPE.

RAND MCCORMICK was perhaps the most greatly puzzled person on the face of the globe as he stood beside Klinck on that stormy night, and waited for the coming of the horseman, now heard in the distance.

As Nat went through, Rand could have shot him through the heart, but a strange something restrained him; a feeling he also had was that this daring horseman was a friend, was hastening to the rescue of the train; yet where could he have got his news, when none but Con even knew their destination until it was nearly reached?

This is what puzzled him.

His finger, which was even pressing the trigger, was removed, and he let his revolver fall.

"What's the matter, man?" shouted Klinck.

"He's an enemy, they're firing at him; make ready, and shoot when you get a chance."

To allay suspicion, Rand fired three or four shots after Nat, but took good care to aim wide of the mark.

He did the shooting with so much show of spirit, that he thoroughly deceived all around him.

"After him!" shouted Con, and away they dashed after the flying messenger.

Rand dismounted, and proceeded to where Klinck lay, he having been carried from his saddle when Nat vaulted over his horse.

Rand found him not insensible, but winded so badly by the force of the fall, that he was gasping for breath.

In about five minutes he was himself again, and then with a string of curses so foul that Rand snuffed the air with the expectation of detecting a sulphurous odor, he arose to his feet.

Just then he heard a pistol shot.

With savage fury he jerked out the words:

"I hope that ball went through his liver!"

"And I hope it didn't," thought Rand; then said aloud: "I guess they are coming back."

"Sounds like it," assented Klinck, and inside of a minute Con was beside them.

"Did you catch him?" asked Klinck.

"No."

"What was that shot?"

"He drove his horse on the track and killed him there so as to stop the train."

This was the signal for another whirlwind of passionate cursing by Klinck.

Con had advanced close enough to see Nat shoot the horse, and then the train being already in sight, he knew he could do nothing now to prevent the miscarrying of the plans of Dill, so he wisely turned about and left the proximity of the train.

On the eminence they remained and waited to see what would be done.

As the minutes glided by and they saw that the train remained motionless where it had stopped, they began to wonder why they did not either go forward or return.

Then they saw the lantern in the hand of the fireman as he advanced to examine the track.

"He's looking for torpedoes," cried Con. "A traitor's hand is apparent in this," and turning around, he said sharply: "Was it you, Klinck?"

Thus it ever is among such men as they were, they never trust each other.

"Me?" said Klinck, in an indignant tone; "no, there's more chance of your being the traitor than me."

Con retorted hotly, and there is no telling what might have been the result of the hard words that followed, had not at that juncture occurred the explosion that cost Bob, the fireman, his life.

This cut short the angry dispute, and as they saw the train start back to Innsbruck they struck spurs into their horses and started for home.

The rain was still falling, although not so heavily, and the heavy blackness of the sky was momentarily giving place to a lighter hue.

Objects began to grow visible, and they could see where they were going.

Con looked around on his little band, gave a start, and then came to a halt; one of their number was missing.

He ordered a return to the hill where Nat had broken through them, and here he found the missing man stretched out in death; his horse stood near by, quietly grazing.

They fastened the body on the horse and once again started homeward.

Several miles had been traversed when they came upon the dead body of a horse, and not far off they saw a man stretched on the ground.

As they advanced, he raised himself up, and with a faint smile he said:

"Halloo, Con, how are you?"

Con looked once, twice, thrice, at the hair reddened with blood, at the face all covered with blood, except little patches which had been washed off here and there by the rain.

At last he recognized him.

"Jimmy Bolton!"

"Yes."

"How came you so?"

"You saw a fellow on horseback?"

"Yes."

"Well, I saw him, too," said Bolton, a certain grim humor underlying the words.

Nat left Bolton for dead; but the villain's time had not come, so the bullet, instead of penetrating his brain, had glided along the whole length of the skull, ripping up the flesh and inflicting a ghastly but not dangerous wound.

It left him unconscious, however, which was broken finally by the rain pattering in his face;

he heard Con coming and greeted them as recorded.

"Who was the fellow—did you know him?"

"Yes—no—that is—I'm danged if I know," was the rather mixed-up reply of Bolton. "I'd sworn it was that Nat Norwood, only that I can take an oath that it couldn't be him."

"Why so?"

It was Rand who put this question in a sharp, shrill tone.

"Hey?" and Bolton eyed him fiercely. "Why, did you say? Because he's dead!" accenting the word; "friend of yours, maybe?" sneeringly.

"He was," said Rand, promptly, "and now I avenge his death."

Out came his revolver; ere a hand could be raised to stay him, he cocked it and aimed it at Bolton's head.

Again was Bolton's life spared by Fate.

Rand had emptied one revolver of the pair he carried; it was this empty one he chanced to pull out, and so, though the hammer fell, Bolton remained unharmed.

Suspicion was now aroused, and Rand was disarmed and put under guard. Bolton mounted the dead man's horse, and they started slowly for the den in the mountains.

Rand was morose and gloomy, and felt angry at having shown his hand.

And another overpowering feeling welled up in his heart, a fearful thirst for revenge on those who had slain his loved companion.

They reached the den and found it in commotion, and upon inquiring what it meant, Con received the reply:

"The girl has escaped!"

The girl! Rand pricked up his ears.

CHAPTER XVI.

NAT ON HIS PINS AGAIN.

WHAT girl had escaped?

Rand listened with all the ears he had, but his eagerness betrayed him, for it was noted by Con, who, therefore, immediately ordered two of his men to take Rand to the castle, which closer inspection showed to be a log hut about ten feet square; it was intended for the confinement of prisoners, and it was strongly built of heavy logs, with no opening in any of its four sides save the single door.

Into this he was roughly thrown, and left to ruminate over his past, present, and possible future.

Meanwhile he heard noise and bustle outside, and so much of it that he became satisfied that whoever the girl was, her escape was a matter of some moment.

And now to relate the mode of Syndie's escape.

You will remember that she had been cruelly beaten by Bet, and that a man, whose name she did not even know, had promised to help her escape that very night.

Buoyed up by this hope, she meekly bore the drunken woman's curses and blows, and inwardly prayed for the night to come.

It came at last, dark and stormy.

She went to bed—if throwing herself down in one corner could be spoken of as going to bed—at an early hour, and though she was painfully wakeful, yet she pretended to sleep.

Bet had got her usual supply of whiskey, and soon she was in a jolly mood, and finally struck up a song in a voice, which, from frequent halts for refreshments, momentarily became thicker, and at last the song died away in a choking gurgle, which represented her ineffectual attempts at articulation.

Then she became silent for a few moments, and then a loud snore conveyed to Syndie the information that she was sleeping.

The girl arose and crept to the door of the hut, and there crouched with wildly beating heart, while minutes dragged slowly by.

"Why don't he come?" she murmured again and again.

Occasionally she heard footsteps approaching, and each she fancied *his*, but was as many times disappointed as she had fancies.

Then the passers-by grew less frequent, and there were longer intervals between them.

After a long silence she heard footsteps once more, and to the girl's intense joy they halted before the door, and she made out that the person was listening.

Then the door was cautiously pushed open from the outside, and a voice asked:

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Then come along."

She stepped across the threshold and out into the raging storm.

"Give me your hand. Say no word, make no

noise, and you will escape without danger. You couldn't have had a better time; this storm will obliterate all traces of you."

At these words, poor Syndie shrank back, for just then the thought struck her:

"Is it wise to leave this place and go with this man? May he not mean me harm? May he not murder me?"

He evidently penetrated her thoughts, for he said:

"Come, miss, we have no time to waste, and don't be afraid of me; I'm a wicked man, but not so bad that I'd harm the likes of you. No—no! God forbid! Come!"

"Anything—even death—is better than staying here to be forced to become the wife of that Con," thought Syndie, and acting on the impulse of the moment, she gave the man her hand and sprang along by his side.

He hurried her through the village, and descended the mountain halfway; here he halted, placed in her hands a little bundle of food, and gave her directions for the remainder of the journey to the railroad.

"One thing you must promise me," said the man.

"What is it?"

"That if by any chance they capture you again, you will not betray me, or say I helped you."

"I never will," said Syndie, solemnly.

"I'll trust you," he said. "And now have you anything to protect yourself with?"

"Yes, I have this knife which I secreted in my dress this afternoon."

"Well, then—good night."

"Good-night," said Syndie. "God bless you for being so good to me."

The outlaw was gone; Syndie was alone.

She remained in the position in which he left her for some few minutes, and then bidding her heart take comfort, she started forward; but in less than fifteen minutes she was brought to a halt, for she found herself stumbling amid rocks and bushes, and knew that she had lost the way.

With a groan at this disheartening discovery she sank down behind a projecting rock, which afforded her some shelter from the storm.

Once she essayed to leave her quarters and find the path, but a fall she received made her return and seek cover again.

One thing that set her heart to trembling was the sound of horses' feet not very distant, which she rightly judged were those of Con's party returning.

"By daylight they will be searching for me," she thought. "But let them come," she said, resolutely clutching the knife-hilt, "I defy them all."

Con was wild when he entered the den, to be told that Syndie was gone; Bet, waking from her drunken slumber, had looked for Syndie, and found her missing; she feared Con when he was fairly aroused, and in a panic, she rushed out doors, and set up a lusty yelling, and having drawn all the men out, they were preparing to make a search when Con returned.

He immediately organized half a dozen parties, and just as day was breaking, smiling after the storm, they dispersed to hunt the girl.

Syndie was up and doing as soon as she could see, but had not gone far when she heard the noise of pursuit.

Like a hunted hare, she looked around for a place of safety as she ran.

She espied a cleft between two rocks, the opening of which was screened by some bushes. Into this she forced her way, and there cowered, trembling, yet hoping.

A better place of concealment she could hardly have found, as once in it, she could not be seen except from above.

One of the parties passed within six feet of her cover without discovering her, an event which strengthened her courage greatly.

Here she lay during the entire day. After nightfall she ventured out, impelled by thirst. Luckily, she soon found a little brooklet that quenched the feeling, for she was driven back by the approach of feet very soon after.

So she passed the night where she had the day, and stayed there all the next day, not daring to venture forth. But night again falling, she determined to make one effort to reach the railroad, and to let nothing deter her.

She started out, and after drinking again at the brook, she stumbled along until she found the road, down which she hurried as fast as her trembling limbs would carry her.

She reached the foothills some time after midnight, weary and sore.

But she pushed on, determined to do or die in the attempt.

* * * * *

And now let us turn to another scene.

Caleb Dill sits in his comfortable armchair enjoying a smoke.

The door opens and a rough-looking fellow enters, who hands the railroad president a letter, which the latter reads after tearing off its covering.

"DILL:—We are in a devil of a stew. The girl escaped and we cannot find her. It is feared she will reach Insbruck, and if she does—"

"Con."

The abrupt closing of the letter, that long dash, spoke volumes.

The calm, contented look fled from Dill's face, and he sprang to his feet with;

"The devil you say!"

"If she reaches Insbruck!"

His face blanched.

"I will go to the mountains myself!" he cried.

"Come along," he said, brusquely, to the messenger, and he hurried aboard of a train just about to start, and soon was speeding along through the darkness.

And where was Nat and Mr. Hernshaw all this while?

Nat concluded his story by showing Mr. Hernshaw the letter of instructions to Con, written and signed by Dill.

"The scoundrel!" hissed Hernshaw. "I suspected as much. Nat—I depend on you—what's to be done? Shall I have Dill arrested at once?"

"No," was the reply; "for you have not evidence sufficient to convict him. You had better wait a day or two until I get strong enough, then raise a company. I will conduct them to the rendezvous in the mountains; it is not likely you will kill all of the scoundrels; capture some of them, offer them life to testify against that arch-foe, Dill. What say you to this?"

"Good!" cried Hernshaw. "I'll follow your advice. I'll go now and dispatch the construction train, and the morning's light will find me preparing my company."

Two days passed.

Nat was able to get up, although he still felt weak.

Mr. Hernshaw debated whether to take the sheriff of the county into his confidence.

"Don't do it," said Nat. "Go to Overton, rather, and raise another company of men."

"I'll do it," said Hernshaw.

A freight train was going westward at 2:30 in the morning, and on the engine of the train Hernshaw decided to go to Overton.

They sped onward through the night, crossed the spot where the torpedoes had been, in safety, and thence rolled along while day gave warning of its approach.

A greyish haze overhung everything.

Objects were visible as through a filmy veil.

A sudden scream brought Hernshaw to his feet, and another drew him to the side of the cab.

His eyes pierced the mist, and he saw, just bursting from the bushes into sight, a girlish figure—behind her was a man; a groan fell from his lips; the girl was his child, the man, a murderer—his bitterest foe!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

MR. HERNSHAW was literally beside himself, so much so that he struck his head again and again to assure himself that he was awake.

He saw the girl struggling in the grasp of a man he had known in bygone years.

He heard the girl scream several times.

Despite this, so stupefied was Mr. Hernshaw, that he could not feel sure of its truth, and to verify it, he glanced at the engineer, who had jumped at the throttle.

"That's right," said the railroad president; then turned his eyes to where he had seen the figures, but found them missing.

"Stop the train!" cried Hernshaw. "Back up—faster—there!" and he sprang to the ground, and dashed toward the clump of bushes and into them.

They were deserted; he found there not even a trace of anybody.

"Syndie!" he called. "Syndie!"

But no reply came.

He dashed wildly here and there, in search of the two figures; but they had vanished as completely as though the earth had swallowed them up.

Hernshaw returned to the engine in a brown study, and glancing at the engineer, he asked:

"Did you see anything?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"What?"

"A man and a girl."

"Thank Heaven!" said Hernshaw, and under his breath, added: "I had begun to think my troubles had turned my brain."

"Well, sir," said the engineer, "what are we to do? Shall we go ahead?"

"No, not just yet. You stay by the engine; the fireman, the conductor, and the brakemen will help me beat up those bushes thoroughly. Come along, boys," and he hurried back again toward the bushes, his mind all the while in a queer conflict.

"I'd swear that voice and face were Syndie's, and yet how can it be when she was burned to death; and Dank's—can it be possible I have seen him?"

By this time they had reached the bushes, and the men entering, commenced and finished a thorough search that, however, had no result.

Hernshaw was nearly beside himself, and scarce knew whether he stood on his head or feet.

What was to be done?

He hated to leave the spot, yet well knew that he could do nothing alone, and so saw the practical thing was to hurry on to Overton as fast as possible and then return as quickly.

"If it was Syndie I saw," he thought, "she is alive and well now. If they have done her no harm yet, why should they in the time that I shall be gone?"

Jumping on the engine, he cried:

"All aboard!" and then ordered the engineer to send his train through as fast as he could.

They reached Overton at about ten o'clock in the morning, and Hernshaw at once telegraphed back to Nat:

"Unexpected circumstances makes our attack on the outlaws to-night a necessity; notify the men—you have the list of names—and leave Insbruck about dusk. We will meet about a couple of miles west of the watering tank. Let the matter be conducted with secrecy."

"HERNSHAW."

Nat greeted the receipt of this telegram with marks of joy; for now that he began to feel strong again, he longed to make some move toward wiping from existence the nest of vipers in the mountains.

Taking a horse and carriage he drove around the country village, stopping to see this or that man, and whisper a few words in his ear.

Nat looked at the list.

Three more yet remained to be notified, and they lived about two miles beyond the outskirts of the town.

At first he half decided not to go to see them, but finally he changed his mind and drove off, saying:

"It's best; every man counts one. We've been fighting against odds clean through. Let's see if we can't change things now."

It was pretty well toward sundown, when having notified the last man, he turned his horse's head in the direction of Insbruck.

About half way there he entered a rather gloomy, dark place in the road, caused by a hill rising abruptly on one side, while the other was fringed heavily with large old trees.

Pretty nearly through these had Nat gone, when suddenly a pistol shot rang out on the air, and a bullet whizzed past Nat's head so closely that it cut away a lock of his hair, and caused him in the alarm of the moment to sink down in the buggy with a hoarse cry.

This proved a fortunate circumstance, for the would-be assassin, whose revolver was cocked for another shot, thinking his purpose accomplished, jumped forth from his concealment and hastened toward the wagon.

Nat comprehended the situation instantly, and with a groan sank down until he was partially screened from view.

Then, with sharp, decisive movements, he reached the butt of his revolver, jerked it forth, and as the murderer in thought stuck his head forward to catch a sight of his supposed victim, he was struck aghast by the frowning muzzle of a revolver beside his temple, while his own revolver, held at his side in his hand, was of no use, since he could be sent to kingdom come before he could half raise it.

"The devil?" gasped Jimmy Bolton, for he it was.

"Astonished, hey?" remarked Nat, coolly. "Well, so goes the world. Ah! got your revolver at your side; want to draw a bead on me—don't you? Now, sir," sternly—"drop your weapon to the ground, or I'll put a bullet through your skull. Drop it!"

Bolton hesitated only for an instant, for he could not mistake the determination that glittered in Nat's blue eyes, which were as hard as adamant in expression.

Thump!

The revolver dropped.

"Now," said Nat, "just put your two hands up and walk along beside the wagon, while I drive out where I can get a better sight of you."

He spoke to the horse, who had stopped when Nat, in falling, had pulled upon the reins.

The animal started at a slow, measured walk, Nat guiding him with his left hand, and keeping the would-be murderer covered with the revolver in his right.

Thus they traversed the few hundred feet which brought them into the greater light of the open road.

"Ah!" cried Nat, as he caught a square look of the villain's features. "I know you; you are James Golden."

Bolton uttered a savage curse, then relapsed into sullen silence.

"Foul-hearted monster!" cried Nat; "so you sought my life, did you?"

Bolton made no reply.

"Never mind," said Nat, "you'll get your deserts yet. Come, get into the wagon."

And Nat forced him to get into the wagon, and to occupy both hands in driving back to Insbruck, while he, meanwhile, kept watch over him, prepared to shoot at the first sign of resistance or attempted escape.

They reached Insbruck, and Nat had him committed to the jail there on a charge of attempt at murder.

As Bolton was forced into his cell he commenced cursing furiously, and somehow the tones of the voice struck Nat as familiar.

He stopped short, looked fixedly at the prisoner a minute, then said:

"You are the fellow whom I have heard called Jimmy Bolton. You helped throw me in the old well, and you shot at me the other night when I saved the train. I thought I had killed you, but it seems not; however," shrugging his shoulders, "you're only reserved for a more befitting fate—the gallows."

And with this parting shot at the raging villain, Nat left.

The train was ready when he reached the depot, and most of the men who were to help extirpate the gang of wretches, were gathered.

Those who were behind time soon made their appearance, then "all aboard," was the cry, and a few minutes later they were speeding away on their mission of vengeance.

And how went things in the camp of the outlaws?

As has been recorded, Caleb Dill was greatly excited over the news of the escape of Syndie Hernshaw, and with curses the most foul on his lips, he started for the mountain retreat of that crowd of vultures, to help recover, if possible, the escaped captive.

Meanwhile, much of interest had transpired there.

Bolton was not so badly wounded as might have been expected, and a few hours rest served to put him on his feet again.

During this time he had been busy in thought, and finally broaching the subject which had occupied his attention, to Con, he said:

"Con, do you think there's a possible chance that the young fellow we threw in the well, could have possibly escaped?"

At the question Con started back as if staggered, and then he cried, hoarsely:

"He has—he did escape. Why, he was the very fellow who captured me; I never saw him before in the light, so I didn't know him."

Bolton groaned out:

"Then my cake is all dough."

"Why did you ask that?" said Con.

"Because I had an idea that the fellow who shot me last night was this very Nat Norwood."

Con ripped out an oath, and added:

"Then we must be careful, for with that fellow around loose, it'll breed mischief for us."

And then with mind sorely troubled, Con turned his attention to the search for Syndie, while Bolton was lost in his own gloomy reflections for several days, during which his wound healed up; by this time he had decided on a course to pursue, and had hurried off to Insbruck, where, to his joy, he found that Nat Norwood was staying.

He watched around until he saw Nat go out in the wagon, followed him as far as the dark place in the road, where he crouched to await his return.

It will be remembered that Syndie, after spending several days of agonizing fear in close

proximity to the wandering parties in search of her, determined to make one supreme effort to escape.

We followed her for awhile after she quitted her place of concealment, and we take up the thread of the history of her flight, just as, by the light of breaking day, her strained eyes catch sight of the far away, long, black line, which she knows to be the railroad track.

With a cry of joy she hurried onward, and was within half a mile of it, when suddenly she came face to face with Caleb Dill, who, having left the train by which he had come from Greenburgh, had gotten just thus far on his journey.

"Ha—ha—ha?" laughed Dill, in glee. "This is lucky; stumbled upon her the very first thing," and with open arms he advanced toward Syndie, who, at first stopping short and panting hard at the unexpected discovery, then turned and fled, with Dill in close pursuit.

The frightened girl fairly flew over the ground, and turning into the bushes, doubled, and started wildly down the mountain, and across the brush-dotted foothills toward the track.

She kept ahead, though she could not help knowing that she was losing ground.

Once she was going to stop, when her soul was cheered by the sound of a coming train.

With a new vigor and strength she sped along; the train came nearer, but a fringe of bushes separated her from the track; but her pursuer was close behind.

The train was passing, Dill was but a few feet behind her.

Syndie sprang forward, the upper part of her body already projected from the bushes when she was seized; she uttered shrill cries for help, saw that they were noticed, struggled to break away, but like a poor bird caught in the fowler's snare, she was dragged back and hurried away.

Again fortune or the devil favored Dill, for several of the "mountain men" met him as he was hurrying toward the hills; picking up the struggling girl, they carried her bodily onward, stopping her cries by stuffing a handkerchief in her mouth, and when Hernshaw was searching, they were far away from the spot.

A couple of hours later Syndie was in her old quarters, once more a prisoner.

Great was the rejoicing among the outlaws when Syndie was brought back, for they had been conjuring up all sorts of fears that would follow on her arrival among her friends.

Dill was more than pleased, for he now considered himself safe.

To be sure, he and the girl had been seen by some one on the train; but then they would hardly dare enter the mountains.

So he reasoned.

And felt safe.

But his heart would surely have thrilled with another feeling had he known that he had been seen by Alexander Hernshaw.

Providentially, Hernshaw had not been recognized by either his daughter or Caleb Dill, the latter being too intent on capturing the girl to more than notice the figure of a man spring to the cab window.

Dill, before this, had held aloof from the mountain den, and now gave Con the word not to betray his identity, at the same time intimating his intention of remaining there until the next day.

"Where is Bolton?" he asked.

"Gone to Insbruck."

"What for?"

"To wipe out Nat Norwood."

"I thought you killed him?"

Con undeceived Dill, who ejaculated:

"The devil! I'm afraid Bolton's got his hands full. I hope he don't get into any trouble; but I do hope he cuts that fellow's throat!"

"So do I!" said Con, earnestly; "for if he don't, there's no telling what may happen. The fellow's been here, right in the village; knowing the ground, he might bring a troop of fellows down on us of a sudden."

"He could hardly do that without my knowing it before hand. I've got the sheriffs in my pay, and they'd let me know."

"If they were consulted," added Con. "That Nat's a sharp fellow, and he wouldn't let any news of that kind fly around loose, you bet."

This conversation but augmented the fears of each, and they were soon in a condition to fancy that the attackers were upon them.

Plucking up courage, however, after a while, Dill said:

"Pshaw! We've got nothing to fear, anyhow, for we'd have the advantage of them every way here. It would be for them a fight against odds which they couldn't master."

Con shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply.

Dinner over, Dill and Con retired to an empty hut, and here, with a bottle of whiskey between them, began hatching up some fresh deviltry against the I. & O. R. R.

They sat devising and planning until darkness had settled o'er the face of the earth, and then, leaving the place, they got some supper.

"To-night," said Con, "is our regular monthly meeting night to give each man his share of plunder. You'll come and look on, of course?"

"Yes."

The meeting was held outdoors, and Con, mounted on a rock, which elevated him a few feet above the heads of the others, made a speech.

The scene was lighted up by a multitude of lanterns, by means of which Con distributed the parcels which had been made.

This sort of business was usually followed by a general debauch, and this time was no exception.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

WITHIN fifteen minutes after the completion of the distribution, every man of that hyena pack was engaged in guzzling whiskey.

Those who had fared well in the distribution, which was by lot, drank for joy, while those who fared ill drank to drown their disappointment.

The women joined in the orgie with much gusto, swore as loudly, talked as foully, and drank as deeply as the men.

Of all in that bowl-shaped valley but four persons retained clear heads.

Two of these were the captives, Syndie and Rand, and the others, Dill and Con, the latter of whom, however, was more so from compulsion than choice, for he longed to be in the midst of the revelry.

The night progressed, and the outlaws grew frenzied with drink.

At length Dill professed himself tired, and asked to be shown to the place where he was to sleep.

Con did so with considerable alacrity, for his heart was with the merry-makers, with whom he soon was.

And right royally did he sail in, as if anxious to make up for lost time.

Rand lay in the hut into which he had been thrown, and listening to the noise of the drunken crowd, inwardly chafed and fretted with the desire for freedom.

He was bound tightly, hand and foot, and lying flat on his back.

"If I could only get rid of these cursed bonds," he muttered, "I'd be all right. If I had my hands free, I'd stake my life on getting out of this place in an hour."

Restless and nervous, and growing more so every minute, Rand commenced rolling laboriously around the floor, without having any particular reason for so doing; yet, although this rolling around was an aimless proceeding, it resulted well, for Rand's back struck upon a sharp ridge where a stone projected above the floor of earth.

At first it only drew out a cry of pain, but soon it was followed by a joyous exclamation.

He had found a use for the sharp-edged stone.

Turning on his back so as to bring the stone just beneath the bond on his wrist, he commenced sawing away.

It was discouraging; for he could not see the progress of his work, and at the expiration of half an hour's hard labor, was apparently as firmly bound as ever.

During all this time he could plainly hear the shouts of the revelers, who were gathered less than a hundred feet from the hut in which he was confined.

The orgie reached its height at the midnight hour, and then Rand could hear little knots of rum-crazed individuals staggering toward his or her particular hole.

And then—"glory!" he cried; the bonds snapped asunder, his hands were free.

For a minute or two he rubbed them together to restore circulation, and then he unfastened his feet.

Rising to an upright position, he now commenced reconnoitering the interior of his prison.

He examined the door, and after testing its strength by bearing his whole weight against it, he gave up all idea of escaping in that way, and bent his particular attention to an examination of the sides of logs.

Here again he was baffled.

Then he thought of the roof, and climbed up to it; but after a few minutes' examination, drop-

ped to the floor, convinced that escape did not lay in that direction.

There was but one course left—that of burrowing out a passage from the inside under the wall to the outside.

This resolved upon, he commenced work immediately, and urged on by an indomitable will, he made rapid progress.

About half the short passage had been completed, when he was astounded by hearing a great outcry, followed by the rapid discharge of fire-arms.

What could it mean?

He paused, and listened.

The cries grew louder and shriller, and their accent—which could not be mistaken—was that of terror.

Then he heard Con's voice rise clear and loud; "At them, curse you all! At them—shoot down the villains! Fight—and remember there's a gallows and a halter for all that's caught!"

A wild cheer—a savage growl—a returning yell of defiance—the infernal din of musketry.

Rand knew it all, they had been hunted out, and were now cornered by aroused vengeance.

"Oh!" groaned Rand, "that I should be shut up here when I may be needed out there!" and then dropping on his knees, he commenced working like a steam engine.

Yes, the avenging hand had fallen.

Nat and his party had been gathered at the place of meeting but a few minutes, when the train from Overton came steaming up.

The two parties joined, and under the leadership of Nat, started for the mountains.

It was a long and tiresome walk, but actuated by such a motive as they had, the men would willingly have doubled the distance and doubled it again.

Nat struck the mountain road and commenced its ascent.

Not any too well acquainted with the way, he pursued his upward course carefully, until at last he gained the mouth of the valley; here he had expected to be challenged, but found this was not so, and was pleased at the good fortune which had enabled them to penetrate to the enemy's door without being discovered.

He could hear wild, maudlin shouting and songs, and guessing at the truth, he bade the men stay behind while he advanced and learned the state of affairs.

Nat was overjoyed to see victory so ready to perch on their banners, and returning, he caused the party to spread out until the whole valley was encircled.

Then, at a shrill whistle, with steady pace, rifles and revolvers well in hand, and knives handy, they advanced upon the huts.

A quartette of drunken outlaws were the first to discover the line advancing, and uttering shouts of alarm and warning, they pulled their ever ready revolvers and fired.

"Fire!" cried Nat, who saw the affair. "Shoot down the dogs, show them no quarter!"

The avenging band obeyed literally, and the four men fell beneath a volley, their bodies transformed into very sieves by the bullets which passed through them.

The drunken outlaws, suddenly awakened from the stupefaction following such heavy potations as theirs had been, tumbled from their beds, and dimly aware that they were called on to fight, clutched revolvers and knives and reeled out-doors.

Con was among the first outside, not having yet laid down, and guessing the whole truth, he urged the outlaws to the attack with the words heard by Rand:

"Close in!" cried Nat. "Now—steady—so—charge!"

And then, in the twinkling of an eye, the horrid combat was raging with fury wild.

Caleb Dill, too, was there!

At the first noise he was on his feet, and ere the second volley was fired he was outdoors, and when Con urged the attack he rushed into the fray.

Firearms all discharged, it became a hand to hand conflict, and from every quarter came the curses and groans of the wounded and dying.

And then the turnings of the fight brought face to face two men—Hernshaw and Dill.

Their identity was disclosed by the sudden blazing up of one of the huts which had caught fire.

"Ah-ha!" cried Mr. Hernshaw. "Villain, I know you!"

"And I know you," said Dill.

A sudden cry of surprise sounded in Alexander Hernshaw's ears, and then he heard the words:

"Great God, that's Caleb Dill, the president of the Greenburgh road!"

A sudden light of intelligence shot across the features of Hernshaw, and he cried:

"Ha—ha! Danks, the murderer, is Caleb Dill. I understand now this hellish business. Die, villain!" and Mr. Hernshaw sprang forward and made a lunge at Danks, or Dill, which, had it fell where it was aimed, must have cut short his mortal career.

But Danks avoided the stroke, and made his knife flash as he made pass after pass at Hernshaw, who steadily forced him back until at last Danks kicked open the door of the hut he had backed against, and disappeared from sight.

Others had witnessed the progress of the fight, and one man was no long in applying a torch to the hut, which, dry as tinder, blazed up immediately.

They waited at the door until the villain should be driven forth.

The flames mounted higher, and spread around until the whole hut nearly was enveloped.

Then from the interior went up a wild, terrified scream, in a female voice.

The avengers were aghast.

A minute more, and Danks appeared through the door, holding in his arms the struggling form of Syndie Hernshaw.

"Ha—ha!" screamed Danks. "Now shoot—shoot—why don't you shoot?" And he leered at those who, with cocked revolvers, had stood ready to shoot him down.

"Syndie!" cried the agonized father.

"Papa!" she called back, in tones of joy, for his presence seemed to her to secure her safety. Hernshaw sprang forward.

"Back!" cried Danks, "back! One step nearer, and I'll fling her among the flames."

Hernshaw stopped short.

A minute—two—three passed, and then Danks began to back away from the burning hut, keeping Syndie in front of him.

When so far distant that no danger could be

apprehended from the fire, Hernshaw sprang forward, but recoiled when, with a fiendish cry of exultation, Danks brandished aloft a glittering knife.

And then the face of affairs was suddenly changed.

A few feet back of Danks was the hut in which Rand was confined. He burst his cover just then, crawled up from the hole in the earth, saw Danks, picked up a stone, raised it on high, and bringing it down on the villain's head, felled him to the ground.

The next moment father and daughter were in each others arms, while Danks, who had struggled to his feet, was shot down like a dog, a fate he richly deserved.

We need add but little more concerning the doings of the band of avengers.

They had fought indeed "against odds" so far as numbers went, but had come off victorious.

When the fight was over, only eight of the outlaws remained alive, the rest being either dead or dying.

These eight, of whom Con formed one, were given a short shrift on neighboring trees, and then the huts were all fired.

The avengers were lenient toward the women, and when they were driven forth by the flames, let them fly whither they would.

Of those in a dying condition, Danks alone was conveyed to Insbruck, where he made restitution of interests in the G. & O. R. R., of which he had come into possession by the foulest treachery.

His bitterness toward Mr. Hernshaw arose in the fact that he had been the means of convicting him of murder in years gone by, Danks escaping the gallows by breaking jail.

The subsequent life of Danks, or Dill, as he chose to call himself, we already know enough of, and will say no more.

Bolton proved to be a cousin of Nat Norwood's.

An uncle, wealthy, had intended making Bolton his heir, but Bolton's rascalities coming to light, he had disinherited him, and made a will in favor of Nat Norwood, provided, as the will read:

"That the said Nat Norwood shall, at the age of twenty-one, bear a character unimpeachable as to honesty and integrity," the old gentleman being evidently afraid to trust any one after having been so deceived in Bolton, or more properly Golden.

This personage escaped with the light sentence of twenty years in prison, a term which he never lived to see finished, for he died while serving out his sentence.

It was this provision of his uncle's will that had compelled Nat to work for a living, although a rich lad prospectively.

Nat saw his twenty-first birthday shortly afterward, and his character being unimpeachable, he had no trouble in assuming control of the legacy.

And Syndie Hernshaw?

It is perhaps superfluous to say that it was not many months after ere Nat took the fair girl by the hand and led her to the hymeneal altar, or that Nat, the "Young Engineer," became the general manager of the I. & O. R. R.

And Rand?

Could Nat ever forget his generous, heartfelt devotion?

No; but keeping his heart warm toward his fireman of old, he advanced him in position rapidly.

Rand owns a pretty house and grounds in Insbruck, has a handsome wife and lovely children; money flows in upon him, good luck attends all his doings, and he declares it is all due to the—
YOUNG ENGINEER.

[THE END.]

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